

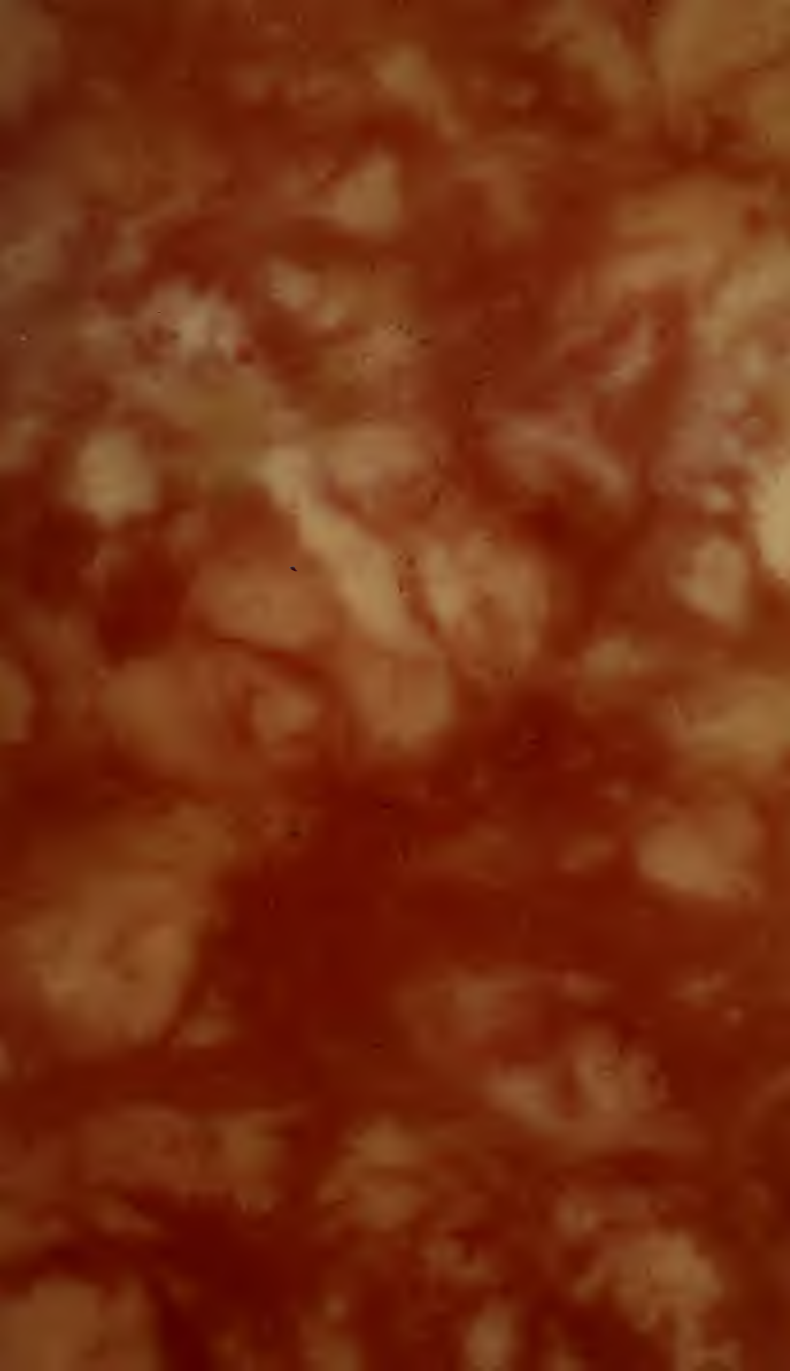




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BEAUCHAMP:

OR,

THE ERROR.

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“THE SMUGGLER,” “DARNLEY,” “RICHELIEU,”

ETC. ETC.

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CHAPTER I.

A HIGH-SOUNDING oath from Sir John Slingsby passed unnoticed, for though every one had heard the shot, each person's attention was suddenly called to an object of his own. Ned Hayward sprang to the window, and looked out; Dr. Miles started up and turned towards Mr. Wittingham; and Beauchamp, who was sitting next to that gentleman, suddenly stretched out his hand, and caught him by the arm and shoulder, so as to break his fall to the ground, though not to stop it; for the worthy magistrate, with a low exclamation of horror,

which reached no ear but one, pressed his hand upon his heart, and fell fainting to the ground, just as if the ball, which had entered the window, had found out the precise spot in his skin which had not been dipped in Styx. Nevertheless, when Sir John and Mr. Beauchamp, and Dr. Miles, lifted him up off the floor, and seated him on his chair again—though they undoubtedly expected to find one of those small holes which I should call a life-door, were it not that they never let life in, if they often let life out—no wound of any kind was to be perceived, except in the wig. Lights were brought; servants hurried in and out; cold water was sprinkled on the old gentleman's face; the butler recommended sal volatile; Sir John Slingsby tried brandy; and, at length, Mr. Wittingham was brought to himself. Every one was busy about him but Ned Hayward; and as Ned was a very charitable and benevolent man, it may be necessary to say why he bestowed no care or attention on Mr. Wittingham. The fact was, that he did not know anything was the matter with him; for Ned Hayward was no longer in the room. The window was open, indeed, and Ned Hayward had jumped out.

To return to Mr. Wittingham, however, no sooner did he recover breath enough to articulate, than he declared, in a low voice, he must go home.

"Why, my dear fellow!" exclaimed Sir John Slingsby, "you're not hurt—only frightened—devilish frightened, that's all; and you are still white about the gills, and fishy in the eyes. Come, come, finish your bottle, and get rid of that haddock-look before you go, or you may faint again in the carriage."

"I must go home," repeated Mr. Wittingham, in a dismal tone.

"Then what's to become of the business you came about?" inquired the baronet.

"I must leave it in your hands, Sir John," replied Mr. Wittingham, rising feebly; "I have no head for it to-night. It was about that notorious poacher, Gimlet, I came. The constables will tell you how I happened to have him apprehended; but I must go—I must go, I have no head for it."

"Though the bullet kept out, plenty of lead has got in, somehow or other," muttered Sir John Slingsby, as his fellow-magistrate tottered towards the door. But the baronet was not a bad-hearted man, and, taking compassion on

Mr. Wittingham's state, he followed him with a large glass of Madeira, insisted upon his drinking it, and supported him under the right arm to the hall-door, where he delivered him over to the hands of the butler to put him safely into his carriage. While effecting all this, Sir John turned round and gazed upon the figure of Stephen Gimlet, and the two officers who had him in charge; and if his look was not peculiarly encouraging to the poacher, it certainly was much less so towards the constables. To say the truth, a constable was an animal towards which, for some reason or another, Sir John Slingsby entertained a great dislike. It is not impossible that his old roving propensities, and sundry encounters with the particular kind of officer which was now under his thumb, had impressed him with a distaste for the whole species; but, assuredly, had he been called upon to give a Linnæan description of the creature, it would have been: "A two-legged beast of the species hound, made to be beaten by blackguards and bullied by magistrates."

Waving his hand, therefore, with an air of dignity, over his extended white waistcoat, he said—

"Bring him in," and leading the way back

to the dining-room, he seated himself in his great chair, supported on either side by decanters; and while the constables were entering, and taking up a position before him, he pushed a bottle either way, to Dr. Miles and Mr. Beauchamp, saying, in as solemn a tone as if he were delivering sentence of death, "A bumper, gentlemen, for a toast—now Master Leathersides, why do you bring this man before me?"

"Why, please your worship's honour," replied the constable, "we apprehended him for poaching in the streets of Tarningham, and ——"

"Halloah!" cried Sir John, "poaching in the streets of Tarningham! that's a queer place to set springes. Leathersides, you're drunk."

"No, please your honour's worship, I ar'n't," whimpered the constable, who would at any time rather have been sent for a week to prison, than be brought up before Sir John Slingsby; "I said, as how we apprehended him in the streets of Tarningham, not as he was a-poaching there."

"Then where was he poaching when you apprehended him?" demanded Sir John, half in fun, half in malice, and with a full determination of puzzling the constable.

"Can't say he was poaching anywhere just then," replied Mr. Leathersides.

"Then you'd no business to apprehend him," replied the baronet; "discharge the prisoner, and evacuate the room. Gentlemen, are you charged? The king, God bless him!" and he swallowed down his glass of wine, winking his eye to Beauchamp, at what he thought his good joke against the constables.

Mr. Leathersides, however, was impressed with a notion that he must do his duty, and that that duty was to remonstrate with Sir John Slingsby; therefore, after a portentous effort, he brought forth the following words:—

"But, Sir John, when we'd a got 'un, Mr. Wittingham said we were to keep un'."

"Where's your warrant?" thundered Sir John.

"Can't say we've got one," said the other constable, for Mr. Leathersides was exhausted.

"If you apprehended him illegally," said Sir John Slingsby, magisterially, "you detained him still more illegally. Leathersides, you're a fool. Mr. What's-your-name, you're an ass. You've both violated the law; and I've a great mind to fine you both—a bumper—so I will, by Jove! Come here and drink the king's

health;" and Sir John laughed heartily while inflicting this very pleasant penalty, as they thought it, upon the two constables. But, resolved to carry the joke out, the baronet, as soon as the men had swallowed the wine, exclaimed, in a pompous tone: "Stephen Gimlet, you are charged with poaching in the streets of Tarningham, and convicted on the sufficient testimony of two constables. Appear before the court to receive sentence. Prisoner, your sentence is this; that you be brought up to this table, and there to gulp down, at a single and uninterrupted draught, one glass of either of those two liquors called Port or Madeira, at the discretion of the court, to the health of our sovereign lord the king; and that, having so done, you shall be considered to have made full and ample satisfaction for the said offence."

"With all my heart, sir," said Ste Gimlet, taking the glass of wine which Sir John Slingsby offered him. "Here's to the king, God bless him! and may he give us many such magistrates as Sir John Slingsby."

"Sir, I've a great mind to fine you another bumper for adding to my toast," exclaimed the baronet; and then, waving his hand to the constables, he continued: "Be off! The

prisoner is discharged; you've nothing more to do with him—stay here, Master Gimlet, I've something to say to you;” and when the door was shut, he continued, with a very remarkable change of voice and manner: “Now, my good friend, I wish to give you a little bit of warning. As I am Lord of the Manor for many miles round the place where you live, the game you have taken must be mine, and, therefore, I have thought myself justified in treating the matter lightly, and making a joke of it. You may judge, however, from this, that I speak disinterestedly, and as your friend, when I point out to you, that if you follow the course you are now pursuing, it will inevitably lead you on to greater offences. It will deprave your mind, teach you to think wrong right, to resist by violence the assertion of the law, and, perhaps, in the end, bring you to the awful crime of murder, which, whether it be punished in this world or not, is sure to meet its retribution hereafter.”

“Upon my life and soul, Sir John,” said Ste Gimlet, earnestly, “I will never touch a head of game of yours again.”

“Nor any one else's, I hope,” answered Sir John Slingsby; “you are an ingenious fellow I

have heard, and can gain your bread by better means."

"How?" inquired the man, emphatically. But the moment after, he added, "I will try, at all events. This very morning, I was thinking I would make a change, and endeavour to live like other people; but then I fancied it would be of no use. First, people would not employ me, and I feared to try them. Next, I feared myself; for I have led a wild rambling kind of life, and have got to love it better than any other. If there were a chance of men treating me kindly, and giving me encouragement, it might answer; but if I found all faces looking cold on me, and all hearts turned away from me—though perhaps I have deserved it—I am afraid I should just fall back into my old ways again. However, I will try—I will try for the child's sake, though it will be a hard struggle at first, I am sure."

Sir John Slingsby laid his finger upon his temple, and thought for a moment. He had been serious for a long while—fully five minutes—and he had some difficulty in keeping up his grave demeanour; but that was not all: some words which Ned Hayward had let fall almost at random, suggested a plan to his mind

which he hesitated whether he should adopt or not. Perhaps—though he was a kind-hearted man, as we have seen and said before—he might have rejected it, had it not been for its oddity; but it was an odd plan, and one that jumped with his peculiar humour. He was fond of doing all sorts of things that other men would not do, simply because they would not—of trying experiments that they dared not try,—of setting at defiance everything which had only custom and convention for its basis; and therefore, after an instant's meditation, given to the consideration of whether people would suppose he was actuated by benevolence or eccentricity (he would not have had them think he did an odd thing from benevolence for the world), he went on as the whim prompted to reply to Stephen Gimlet's last words, mingling a high degree of delicacy of feeling with his vagaries, in the strangest manner possible, as the reader will see.

“Well Ste,” he said, “perhaps we may make it less of a struggle than you think. I'll tell you what, my fine fellow, you're very fond of game—a little too fond perhaps. Now, my friend, Ned Hayward—that's to say, Captain Hayward—where the deuce he has gone to.

I don't know!—run after the clumsy fellow, I suppose, who fired through the window and missed the deer too, I'll be bound (it must have been Conolly, the under-keeper—nobody but Conolly would have thought of firing right towards the window)—but as I was saying, my friend, Ned Hayward, said just now that you'd make a capital keeper. What do you think of it, Gimlet? Wouldn't it do?"

"Not under Mr. Hearne, sir," answered Ste Gimlet. "We've had too many squabbles together;" and he shook his head.

"No, no, that would never do," replied Sir John, laughing; "you'd soon have your charges in each other's gizzards. But you know Denman died a week ago, over at the Trottington Hall manor, on t'other side of the common—you know it, you dog—you know it well enough, I can see by the twinkling of your eye! I dare say you have looked into every nest on the manor, since the poor fellow was himself bagged by the grim sportsman. Well, but as I was saying, there's the cottage empty and eighteen shillings a week, and you and Hearne can work against each other, and see which will give us the best day's sport at the end of the year. What do you say, Gimlet? you can

go and take possession of the cottage this very night; I don't want it to stand empty an hour longer."

"Thank you, a thousand times, Sir John!" said the man, heartily; "you are a kind gentleman indeed, but I must go up to my own place first. There's my little boy, you know. Poor little man, I dare say he has cried his heart out."

"Pooh, nonsense—not a bit!" said the baronet, "I'll take care of all that. I'll send up, and have him fetched."

The man smiled and shook his head, saying, "He would not come with a stranger."

"What will you bet?" cried Sir John Slingsby, laughing. "I'll bet you a guinea against your last ferret, that he'll come directly. Here, Matthew—Moore—Harrison," he continued, first ringing the bell, and then opening the door to call—"some of you d—d fellows run up, and bring Ste Gimlet's little boy. Tell him, his daddy's here," and Sir John Slingsby sat down and laughed prodigiously, adding, every now and then, "I'll take any man five guineas of it that he comes."

There is an exceedingly good old English expression, which smart people have of late years banished from polite prose, but which I

shall beg leave to make use of here. Sir John Slingsby, then, was known to be a *comical fellow*. Stephen Gimlet was well aware that such was the case; and though he thought the joke was a somewhat extravagant one, to send a man-servant up to the moor at that hour of the evening, to fetch down his little boy, yet still he thought it a joke. His only anxiety, however, was to prevent its being carried too far, and, therefore, after twirling his hat about for a minute in silence, he said—

“Well, Sir John, perhaps if he’s told I am here, he may come; but now I recollect, I locked the door; and besides, there are all my things to be fetched down; so if you will be kind enough to give me till to-morrow, sir, I will accept your bounty with a thankful heart, and do my best to deserve it—and I am sure I am most grateful to the gentleman who first spoke of such a thing. I am, indeed,” he added, with some degree of hesitation, and cheek rather reddened; for while Sir John was still laughing heartily, he saw that Mr. Beauchamp’s fine lustrous eyes were fixed upon him with a look of deep interest, and that Doctor Miles was blowing his nose violently, while his eyelids grew rather red.

"I don't doubt it in the least, Ste," said Sir John; "Ned Hayward is a very good fellow—a capital fellow—you owe him a great deal, I can tell you. There! there!" he continued, as the door opened to give admission to the servant, "I told you he would come—didn't I tell you? There he is, you see!"

Stephen Gimlet gazed for an instant in silent astonishment when he beheld the boy in the butler's arms, wrapped warmly up in the house-keeper's shawl; for at Sir John's indisputable commands, they had taken him from his bed. He was confounded: he was as one thunder-struck; but the moment after, the child, recovering from the first dazzling effect of the light, held out his little hands to his father with a cry of delight, exclaiming, "There's my daddy—there's my daddy!" and the poacher sprang forward, and caught him to his heart.

Sir John Slingsby was himself overset by what he had done: the tears started in his eyes; but still he laughed louder than ever; out-trumpeted Doctor Miles with blowing his nose, wiped away the tears with the back of his hand, put on his spectacles to hide them, and then looked over the spectacles to see Ste Gimlet and his boy.

The child was nestling on his father's breast and prattling to him; but in a moment the man started and turned pale, exclaiming, "Fire!—the place burnt! What in Heaven's name does he mean?"

"There, my good man!" cried Dr. Miles, coming forward and making the man sit down, seeing that he looked as ghastly as the dead, with strong emotion. "Don't be alarmed, Stephen. Don't be agitated. Lift up the voice of praise and thanksgiving to God, for a great mercy shown you this day, not alone in saving your child from a terrible death, but in having sent you a warning with a most lenient hand, which will assuredly make you a better man for all your future days. Lift up the voice of praise, I say, from the bottom of your heart."

"I do, indeed!" cried the poacher; "I do, indeed!" and bending down his head upon the boy's neck, he wept. "But how did it happen?—how could it happen?" he continued, after a while, "and how, how was he saved?"

"Why, Ned Hayward saved him, to be sure," cried the baronet. "Gallant Ned Hayward—who but he? He saw the place burning from the top of the barrow, man, rushed in, burnt himself, and brought out the boy."

"God bless him! God bless him!" cried the father. "But the fire," he added, "how could the place take fire?"

"That nasty cross man set it on fire, daddy, I'm sure," said the boy; "the man that was there this morning. He came when you were away, and he wouldn't answer when I call'd, and I saw him go away, through the peep-hole, with a lighted stick in his mouth. I didn't do it, indeed, daddy."

A glimpse of the truth presented itself to Stephen Gimlet's mind; and though he said nothing, he clenched one hand tight, so tight that the print of the nails remained in the palm; but then his thoughts turned to other things, and rising up out of the chair in which Doctor Miles had placed him, he turned to Sir John Slingsby, and said, "Oh, sir, I wish I could say how much I thank you!"

"There, there, Stephen," replied the baronet, waving his hand kindly, "no more about it. You have lost one house and you have got another; you have given up one trade and taken a better. Your boy is safe and well; so, as the good doctor says, praise God for all. Take another glass of wine, and when you have talked a minute with the little man, give

him back to the housekeeper. He shall be well taken care of till you are settled, and in the meantime, you can go down to the Marquis of Granby, in the village, and make yourself comfortable till to-morrow.—Hang me if I drink any more wine to-night. All this is as good as a bottle;" and Sir John rose to join the ladies.

The other two gentlemen very willingly followed his example; but before they went, Beauchamp, who had had his pocket-book in his hand for a minute or two, took a very thin piece of paper out of it, and went round to Stephen Gimlet.

"You have lost all your furniture, I am afraid," he said, in a low voice; "there is something to supply its place with more."

"Lord bless you, sir! what was my furniture worth!" said the poacher, looking at the note in his hand, with a melancholy smile; but by that time Beauchamp was gone.

CHAPTER II.

“ I WONDER where the deuce Ned Hayward can be gone !” was the exclamation of Sir John Slingsby, about ten o’clock at night, when he found that his young guest did not re-appear ; and so do I wonder, and perhaps so does the reader, too. It will therefore be expedient, in order to satisfy all parties, to leave the good people at Tarningham-park, and pursue our friend at once, for we have no time to spare, if we would catch him. He is a desperate hard rider when there is any object in view, and he certainly left the park on horseback.

When last we saw him, the hour was about half-past seven or a quarter to eight; night was

beginning to fall, and without doing anything figurative in regard to the evening—without comparing the retiring rays of light to the retreat of a defeated army, or the changing colour of the sky to the contents of a London milk-maid's pail under the influence of the pump—we may be permitted to say that the heavens were getting very grey ; the rose and the purple had waned, and night, heavy night, was pouring like a deluge through the air. Nevertheless, the night was fine, a star or two shone out, and the moment Ned Hayward sprang to the window through which the ball had come, he saw a figure hurrying away through the trees, at the distance of about three hundred yards. They were fine old trees, with no underwood—English park trees, wide apart, far-spreading, gigantic ; and Ned Hayward paused an instant to gaze, after he had jumped out of the window, and then took to his heels, and ran on as fast as a pair of long, strong, well-practised legs would carry him. There was turf below him, and his feet fell lightly, but he had not gained more than fifty yards upon the figure, when he saw through the bolls another figure, not human but equine. For a short distance, the person he pursued did not

seem aware that he had a follower; but before the time arrived when the horse became apparent, some indications seemed to reach his ear, and if Ned Hayward ran quick, the other seemed to run nearly as fast. When the young gentleman was within a hundred yards of him, however, the man was upon the horse's back and galloping away.

Ned Hayward stopped, and followed him with his eyes, marking the course he took, as far as the light would permit. He then listened, and heard the noise of the horse's feet distinctly beating the ground in one direction. The next moment, the sounds became confused with others, as if another horse were near, and turning round to the road which led from the gate on the side of Tarningham, the young officer saw a mounted man coming slowly up towards the house.

"By Jove, this is lucky!" said Ned Hayward, as he recollected having heard Sir John Slingsby tell a groom to carry a note to Mr. Wharton, the lawyer. And running down to the road as fast as possible, he stopped the servant, and bade him dismount, and let him have the horse immediately.

The groom recognised his master's guest,

but he had some hesitation, and began his reply with a "Please, sir—" But Ned cut him short at once, in a very authoritative tone; and in two minutes he was in the saddle. He paused not an instant to think, for calculation was a very rapid process with him, and, during his morning's rambles, he had marked, with a soldier's eye, all the bearings and capabilities of the park and the ground round about it. The result of his combinations was thus expressed upon the mental tablet, or nearly thus:—

"The fellow cannot get out by the way he has taken; for there is no gate, and the park paling is planted at the top of the high bank, so that no man in England dare leap it. He must take to the right or left. On the left, he will be checked by the river and the thick copse, which would bring him round close to the house again. He will, therefore, take to the right, and pass the gates on the top of the hill. He must come down half way to the outer gates, however, before he can get out of the lane; and I shall not be much behind him."

He accordingly rode straight to the gates on the Tarningham side, passed them, turned sharp to the left, galloped up the sandy lane

under the park wall, and blessed his stars as he saw the edge of the moon beginning to show itself in the east.

“Hang me, if I give up the chase till I have run him down!” said Ned Hayward; but when a man sets out hunting a fox with such a determination, he never knows how far the fox or the determination may lead him. Away he went, however, like a shot. The horse was a strong, well-built cob, of about fourteen hands three, which had been accustomed to bear the great bulk and heavy riding of Sir John Slingsby to cover; and it sprang out under the lighter weight and better balance of the younger man as if it had a feather on its back. Up the hill they went, all gathered together, like a woolpack: an easy hand, an easy seat, and an exact poise, made the rider seem to the beast not half his real weight; and, in two minutes, Ned Hayward’s quick ear caught the sound of other hoofs besides those underneath him. “I shall have him now!” he said; but suddenly the sounds became fainter. Three springs more, and he had the horseman before him, but at a hundred and fifty yards’ distance, going over the moor. There was a fence and ditch on the right hand, and Ned Hayward

pushed his horse at them. The good little beast rose gallantly by the moonlight,—but there was a ditch on the other side also, which neither saw. He cleared it with his fore-feet, but his hind went in, and over he came sprawling. Neither rider nor beast were hurt, and Ned Hayward picked him up in a minute, and away again.

The fugitive had gained ground, nevertheless, and was shooting off like a falling star; but the moonlight was now bright, lying in long misty lines upon the moor. A few rapid steps brought them to the sandy road, and on—on they dashed, as if for life. On, however, dashed the other horseman likewise. He knew the ground well—his horse was good: he really rode for life. It was as even a race as ever was seen. The wide moor extended for miles, every tree and bush was visible, and even the distant belts of planting, where the common ended on the right, could be seen lying black and heavy against the moonlight sky; but yet there was a darkness over the ground which showed that it was not day; and still, as he urged the willing beast forward, Ned Hayward kept a ready hand upon the bridle, in case of need. Soon he thought he gained upon the

other, but then he saw him turn from the sandy road, and take over the turf to the left. Ned Hayward ran across, and pressed hard the beast's sides. On, on they went; but the next instant the ground seemed darker before him, and the pursuer checked up his horse suddenly upon the very edge of a deep pit, while the other rode on unobstructed on the further side.

Not more than a moment was lost or gained, however, for turning quickly round the edge of the pit, though keeping a sharper eye upon the ground than before, Ned Hayward still followed a diagonal course, which saved him as much of the distance between him and the fugitive as he had lost by the temporary check. When he, too, had got to the other side of the pit, the space between them was about the same that it had been at first, but the ground sloped gently downward, and then spread out in a perfect flat with neither trees nor bushes, although some thick rushy spots assumed, here and there, the appearance of bunches of bramble or bilberry, but afforded no interruption to the horses' speed, and on they went, helter skelter, over the moor, as if the great enemy were behind them.

In a few minutes a light was visible on the

right, and Ned Hayward said to himself, "He is making for some house;" but the next instant the light moved, flitting along from spot to spot, with a blue, wavering, uncertain flame, and with a low laugh, the young gentleman muttered, "A will-o'-the-wisp. That shan't lead me astray this time, at least."

On he dashed, keeping the horseman before him; but ere he had passed the meteor a hundred yards, he felt the pace of his horse uneasy, the ground seemed to quiver and shake under his rapid footfalls, and a splashy sound was heard, as if the hoofs sank into a wet and marshy soil.

"A shaking bog, upon my life," said Ned Hayward, "but as he has gone over it, so can I."

With his horse's head held tightly up, his heels into its sides, the bridle shaken every minute to give him courage, and a loud "Tally ho!" as if he were in sight of a fox, on went Ned Hayward, with the water splashing up around him till the hoofs fell upon firmer ground, and a slight slope upwards caught the moonlight, and showed the fugitive scampering away with a turn to the right,

"Hoiks, hoiks! halloo!" cried Ned Hay-

ward, applying the flat of his hand to the horse's flank, and, as if inspired by the ardour of the chase, the brave little beast redoubled its efforts, and strained up the hill after the larger horse, gaining perceptibly upon it.

Clear and full in the moonlight the dark figure came out from the sky as he cleared the edge of the hill, and in two seconds, or not much more, Ned Hayward gained the same point.

The figure was no longer visible. It had disappeared as if by magic; horse and rider were gone together, and all that could be seen was the gentle slope downward that lay at the horse's feet, a darkish spot beyond, which the moon's rays did not reach, and then the moor extending for about a couple of miles further, marked in its undulations by strong light and shade.

"Why, what the devil is this?" exclaimed Ned Hayward; but though he sometimes indulged in an exclamation, he never let astonishment stop him, and seeing that if the figure had taken a course to the right or left he must have caught sight of it, he rode straight at the dark spot in front, and found that it consisted of one of the large pits, with which the moor was spotted,

filled to the very top of the banks with low stunted oaks, ashes, and birch trees.

“Earthed him! earthed him!” said Ned Hayward, as he looked round, but he made no further observation, and soon perceived the sandy cart-road which the man must have taken to descend into the pit.

The young gentleman was now a little puzzled; the natural pertinacity and impetuosity of his disposition would have led him to plunge in after the object of his chase, like a terrier dog after a badger, but then he saw that by so doing, the man, who knew the ground apparently much better than he did, would have the opportunity of doubling upon him and escaping his pursuit, while he was losing himself among the trees and paths. Rapid in all his calculations, and seeing that the extent of the hollow was not very great, so that by the aid of the moonlight, any figure which issued forth would become visible to him as long as he remained above, Ned Hayward trotted round the edge of the pit to make himself perfectly sure that there was no small path or break in the banks, by which the object he had lodged in the bushes beneath him might effect its flight without his perceiving it.

Having ascertained this fact, he took up his position on the highest ground near, that he might command the whole scene round, and then dismounting, led his horse up and down to cool it gradually, saying to himself, "I will stop here all night rather than lose him. Some persons must come by in the morning, who will help me to beat the bushes."

Ned Hayward concluded his reflections, however, with a sentence which seemed to have very little connexion with them.

"She's an exceedingly pretty girl," he said, "and seems to be as amiable as she is pretty, but I can't let that stop me."

I do not at all understand what he meant, but perhaps the reader may find some sense in it. But while he was reflecting on pretty girls, and combining them in the oddest way possible with his hunt after a man who had fired a shot into the window of Tarningham House, an obtrusive recollection crossed his mind that moors will go down, and that then wide open moors with many a shaking bog and pitfall were not the most lustrous and well-lighted places upon earth, which remembrance or reflection puzzled him exceedingly. Though we have never set up Ned Hayward for a conjuror, he was an ex-

ceedingly clever, dashing, and amiable person; but he was far from being either a magician or an astronomer, and not having an almanack in his pocket, nor being able to read it if he had, he was not at all aware of the hour at which the moon went down. He saw, indeed, that she had already passed her prime, and was verging towards decline, and it was with a very unpleasant sensation that he thought, "Hang her old untidy horns, she will be gone before the day breaks, and a pleasant dark place it will be when she no longer gives me light. I will stop and watch, however, but I must change my tactics, and hide under the hill. Perhaps he may think I am gone, and come out with fresh courage. The young blackguard! it would be a good turn to all the world to hang him, if it is but to prevent him marrying such a nice girl as that, who is a great deal too good for him. She won't thank me, however, for my pains."

This thought, somehow or other, was not pleasant to our friend Ned Hayward, and, indeed, like most of us, in many even of the ordinary circumstances of life, he was affected by very different emotions. Why it was, or wherefore, he could not tell, but he had been seized with a strong inclination to hang, or otherwise

dispose of any gentleman whom he could suspect of being a favoured lover of Mary Clifford; and yet, on the other hand, he had every disposition in the world to oblige Mary Clifford himself. These two objects seemed incompatible, but there is a passion in the world which has a strange knack of trying to overcome impossibilities, and sometimes succeeds, too—at least, in overcoming those things which fathers and mothers, relations, guardians, and friends have pronounced to be insurmountable. At all events, Ned Hayward made up his mind that it was his duty not to abandon his pursuit so long as there was a chance of its being successful, and, consequently, he drew his horse a little further from the edge of the pit, as soon as he had considered the peculiar circumstances of Mistress Moon, and endeavoured to keep out of sight as far as possible, while he himself watched eagerly, with nothing but his head as far as the eyes above the edge of the acclivity.

Fancy is a wonderful thing, and it has been accounted for some people as good as physic. I should say it was better for most men; but yet, taken in too large doses it is dangerous, very dangerous. Now, Ned Hayward had, that

night, taken too large a dose, and the effect was this: he imagined he was perfectly well acquainted with the figure, person, and appearance of the horseman whom he had hunted from under the walls of Tarningham-park to the spot where he then stood with his horse's bridle over his arm. He could have sworn to him!—very lucky it was that nobody called upon him to do so, as he found out within a quarter of an hour afterwards. Fancy painted his face and his figure, and a tremendous black eye, and a bruised cut down the side of his nose. Now, as the man lay there quietly ensconced in the pit, his face was very different, his figure was not at all the same, and no black eye, no bruised cut, gave evidence of the scuffle which had taken place two nights before. It was, in fact, quite a different person, and all the young gentleman's calculations were wrong together. It is a very happy thing indeed for a man in the wrong, when he acts in the same manner as he would if he were right. His doing so, it is true, sometimes proceeds from good sense, sometimes from good feeling, sometimes from fortunate circumstances, but, at all events, such was Ned Hayward's case in the present instance, for he had made up his

mind to remain upon the watch, and he would have watched as zealously and only a little more pleasantly, if he had known perfectly well who the man was, instead of mistaking him for another. When he had remained about seven minutes and a half, however—I cannot speak to a few seconds more or less, and a slight mistake will make no great difference, as the first heat was over, and our friends were only taking breathing time—but when he had remained for about seven minutes and a half, his horse started at something behind him, and when the young gentleman turned round, he perceived a long shadow cross the space of moonlight on the common, showing that some living object was moving in a slanting direction between him and the south-western side of the sky. The first question he asked himself was naturally, who he could be, and the first answer that suggested itself was, “Perhaps one of this fellow’s comrades.”

Two to one, indeed, were not odds that at all daunted our young friend; and turning quite round, for an instant he looked at the figure as it came down, and then directed his eyes towards the edge of the pit again. He kept a sharp watch upon the approaching party,

however, and though the step upon the soft turf made no great sound, his eyes were suddenly brought round upon the visitor of his solitary watch, when about ten yards still remained between them. The moon now served our good friend as well as if he had been a lover, showing him distinctly the face, features, and figure of the person before him, and he instantly exclaimed—

“Ah, Stephen, this is lucky! What brought you here?”

“Why, sir,” answered the man, “this is part of my beat, and as soon as I had got some supper down at the village, as it is not fair to take a gentleman’s money without doing something for it, and as I am rather accustomed to a walk on a moonlight night, I thought I might as well just come out to see that all is safe. I can guess what brought you here, for Ned, the groom, told me you had taken his horse and were off like a shot.”

“Hush!” said Ned Hayward; “don’t speak so loud, my good fellow; I have earthed him amongst those trees in the pit there, but I could not dig him out, for I was afraid he would escape one way while I was hunting him the other.”

“Ah! ah! you have got him, then?” said Gimlet; “then, that’s a piece of luck. If he swings it will be no bad job; a bloody-minded scoundrel!”

Ned Hayward was somewhat surprised to hear his friend Wolf qualify by so unsavoury an epithet a gentleman, whose friend and companion he had very lately been. The young officer, however, knew a good deal of the world and the world’s ways, and he was not at all inclined to honour the *ci-devant* poacher for so sudden a change of opinion. His first thought was, this man must be a scoundrel at heart, after all, to abuse a man whom he has been consorting with in this manner, without any motive for so doing, except the simple fact of a change in his own avocations. If he thought young Wittingham a very respectable person two or three hours ago, when he himself was only Wolf the poacher, I do not understand why he should judge him a bloody-minded villain, now that he himself has become Stephen Gimlet, second keeper to Sir John Slingsby. This does not look like honesty.

A second thought, however, upon all he had seen of the man’s character, the frankness, the hardihood, even the dogged determination he

had shown, induced Captain Hayward to say to himself, "The fellow can't know who it is;" and as thought is a very rapid thing, he replied with a perceptible pause, "Yes, I have got him, safe and sure, and if you'll help he cannot get away. You guess who he is, I dare say, Stephen?"

"O, to be sure, sir," answered Gimlet; "it is that young scoundrel, Harry Wittingham. Bad's the crow and bad's the egg," he continued, without knowing he was using a Greek proverb; "I suppose it can be no one else; for I heard from the old housekeeper down in the town, that he swore like fury that he would have vengeance on his father if he laid the information against him before Sir John."

"Humph!" said Ned Hayward; "but then," he thought, "I am rather hard upon the man, too. The idea of any one in cold blood firing a shot at his own father is certainly enough to rouse the indignation and disgust even of men who would wink at, or take part in, lesser crimes to which they are more accustomed. Come, Stephen," he continued aloud, "now you are here, we may do better than I could alone. Let us see what is to be done."

"Oh, we'll soon manage it, sir," answered

Wolf, "I know every bit of the pit well enough; there is but one place he can go to with his horse, and but one road up the bank. He can round the inside of the pit two ways, sure enough, but what we had best do is, to go in till we can see what he is about, and then have a rush upon him together or separate, or cut him off either way."

Captain Hayward agreed in this view of the case, and after a few more words of consultation, the horse was fastened to a scraggy hawthorn tree, and stooping down as low as possible, to conceal their approach, Captain Hayward and his companion advanced along the cart-road down into the pit. The moment after they began to descend, the bank on the right cast a shadow over them, which favoured their operations; and Gimlet, taking the lead, crept silently along a path which had once served for the wagons that carried the sand out of the pit, but was now overgrown with grass, and hemmed in with bushes, shrubs, and trees of forty or fifty years' growth. No moonlight penetrated there, and all was dark, gloomy, and intricate. Now the path turned to the right, now to the left, then proceeded straight-forward again, and then began to

mount a little elevation in the surface, or floor, as the miners would call it, of the pit itself, still thickly surrounded by green shrubs, through which, however, the slanting beams of the moon were shining over the edge of the pit. Stephen Gimlet's steps became even still more quiet and cautious, and he whispered to Ned Hayward to walk lightly, for fear the fugitive should catch a sound of their approach, and make his escape. Each step occupied several seconds, so carefully was it planted; the slight rustling of the leaves, catching upon their clothes, and each movement of a branch, which, pushed aside as they passed, was dashed back upon those behind, made them pause and listen, thinking that the object of their eager pursuit must have caught the sound as well as their own nearer ears. At length, Stephen Gimlet stopped, and putting back his hand, held his companion aloof for an instant, while he leaned forward, and brought his eyes close to a small hole between the branches. Then drawing Ned Hayward forward, he pointed in the same direction in which he had been looking, with his right finger, and immediately laid it upon his lips, as a token to be silent. Ned Hayward bent his head, and gazed through

the aperture as his companion had done. The scene before him was a very peculiar one. In broken beams, filtered, as we may call it, by the green leaves and higher branches, the moonlight was streaming upon a small open space, where the ground rose into a swelling knoll, covered with green turf and moss. There was one small birch tree in the midst, and a hawthorn by its side, but all the rest was clear, and on the right hand could be seen, marked out by the yellow sand, the cart-road which led to the moor above. Standing close to the two little trees was a horse, a fine, strong, powerful bay, with a good deal of bone and sinew, long in the reach, but what is unusual in horses of that build, with a chine and shoulder like those of a wild boar. Close to the horse, with the bridle thrown over his arm, and apparently exceedingly busy upon something he was doing, stood a tall, powerful man, whose face, from the position in which he had placed himself, could not be seen; his back, in short, was towards Ned Hayward and his companion, but from under his left arm protruded part of the stock of a gun, which a moonbeam that fell upon it showed as plainly as the daylight could have done. From the position in which he

held the fire-lock, it seemed to Ned Hayward as if he were attending to the priming, and the moment afterwards the click of the pan proved that the supposition was correct.

At the same time this sound met his ear, the young gentleman was drawn gently back by the hand of his companion, and the latter whispered, "That's Harry Wittingham's horse, I'd swear to him amongst a thousand; but that's not Henry Wittingham himself—of that I'm quite sure."

"I cannot see his face," answered Ned Hayward, in the same low tone, "but the figure seems to me very much the same."

"Hush! he's moving," said the man; "better let us go round and cut him off by either road, you to the right and I to the left—straight through that little path there—we shall have a shot for it, but we must not mind that—see, he is looking at his girths."

The man whom they spoke of had seemed perfectly unconscious of the presence of any such unwelcome visitors near him. His motions were all slow and indifferent, till the last words had passed Stephen Gimlet's lips; then, however, he turned suddenly round, displaying a face that Captain Hayward did not at all

recollect, and gazing direct to the spot where they stood, he raised his gun, already cocked, to his shoulder, and fired.

Fortunately, it so happened that Ned Hayward had taken one step in the direction which his companion had pointed out, otherwise the ball, with which the piece was charged would have passed right through his breast. As it was, it grazed his left arm, leaving a slight flesh wound; and, seeing that they were discovered, both he and Stephen Gimlet dashed straight through the trees towards the object of their pursuit. He, in the meantime, had put his foot in the stirrup, and sprung upon his horse's back. One rushed at him on either side; but without a moment's consideration, the man dashed at the poacher, brandishing the gun which he held in his hand like a club. As he came up, without giving ground an inch, Stephen clutched at his bridle, receiving a tremendous blow with the stock of his gun, and attempting to parry it with his left hand. The man raised his rein, however, at the same moment he struck the blow, and Stephen missed the bridle. He struck at him with his right, however, in hope of bringing him from his horse, and with such force and truth did he

deliver his reply to the application of the gunstock, that the man bent down to the horse's mane, but at the same time he struck his spurs deep into the beast's flanks, passed his opponent with a spring, and galloped up to the moor.

"I am away after him!" cried Ned Hayward, and darting along the road like lightning, he gained the common, unhooked his own horse from the tree, and recommenced the pursuit with the same figure still flying before him.

The steep rise of the pit had somewhat blown the fugitive's horse, and for the first hundred yards or so Captain Hayward gained upon him; but the foremost horseman soon brought all his knowledge of the country to bear,—every pond, every bank, every quagmire, gave him some advantage, and when, at the end of about ten minutes, they neared the plantations at the end of the moor, he was considerably further from his pursuer than when their headlong race began. At length, he disappeared where the road led in amongst trees and hedges, and any further chase seemed to promise little. Ned Hayward's was a sadly persevering disposition, however; he had an exceedingly great dislike to be frustrated in anything,

and on he, therefore, rode without drawing a rein, thinking, "In this more populous part of the country, I shall surely meet with some one whom he has passed, and who will give me information."

It was a wonderfully solitary, a thinly-peopled district, however, which lay on the other side of the moor from Tarningham. They went early to bed, too, in that part of the world, and not a living soul did Ned Hayward meet for a full mile up the long lane. At the end of that distance, the road branched into three, and in the true spirit of knight-errantry, the young gentleman threw down his rein on the horse's neck, leaving it to carry him on in search of adventures, according to its own sagacity. The moor was about four miles and a half across; but in the various turnings and windings they had taken, now here and now there upon its surface, horse and man had contrived to triple that distance, or perhaps something more. There had been a trot to the town before and back again, a hand-canter through the park, and then a tearing burst across the moor. The horse therefore thought, with some reason, that there had been enough of riding and being ridden for one night, and as soon as Ned Hay-

ward laid down the reins it fell from a gallop to a canter, from a canter to a trot, and was beginning to show an inclination to a walk, if not to stand still, when Ned Hayward requested it civilly with his heels to go on a little faster. It had now selected its path, however, remembering Ovid's axiom, that the middle of the road is the safest. This was all that Ned Hayward could have desired at its hands, if it had had any ; but of its hoofs he required that they should accelerate their motions, and on he went again at a rapid pace, till, suddenly turning into a high road, he saw nearly before him on the left hand, six large elms in a row, with a horse-trough under the two nearest ; an enormous sign swinging between the two central trees, and an inn, with four steps up to the door, standing a little back from the road.

There was a good light streaming from some of the windows ; the moon was shining clear, but the dusty old elms were thick with foliage, which effectually screened the modest figures on the sign from the garish beams of either the domestic or the celestial luminary.

Ned Hayward drew in his rein as soon as he beheld the inn and its accompaniments ; then approached softly, paused to consider, and

ultimately rode into the court-yard, without troubling the people of the house with any notification of his arrival. He found two men in the yard in stable dresses, who immediately approached with somewhat officious civility, saying, "Take your horse, sir?"

And Ned Hayward, dismounting slowly, like a man very much tired, gave his beast into their hands, and affected to saunter quietly back to the inn, while they led his stout little cob into the stables. Then suddenly turning, after he had taken twenty steps, he followed at a brisk pace, he passed the stable-door, walking deliberately down the whole row of horses in the stalls, till he stopped opposite one—a bright bay, with a long back, and thick, high crest, which was still covered with lather, and had evidently been ridden furiously not many minutes before.

Turning suddenly to the ostler and his help, who had evidently viewed his proceedings with more consternation than was quite natural, he placed himself between them and the door, and demanded with a bent brow and a stern tone, "Where is the master of this horse?"

The help, who was nearest, gasped in his face like a caught trout, but the ostler pushed

him aside, and replied instantly, "He is indoors, sir—in number eleven."

And turning on his heel, Ned Hayward immediately entered the inn.

CHAPTER III.

WE left Sir John Slingsby with an exclamation in his mouth. An expression of wonder it was, at what could have become of his friend Ned Hayward, and the reader may recollect that it was then about ten o'clock at night. Quitting the worthy baronet in somewhat abrupt and unceremonious haste, we hurried after the young officer ourselves, in order to ascertain his fate and fortune with our own eyes; and now having done that, we must return once more to Tarningham-park, and make an apology to Sir John, for our rude dereliction of his house and company. He is a good-natured man, not naturally inclined to make himself peculiarly

anxious or apprehensive about any man on the face of the earth; so that, even in the case of his dear friend Ned Hayward, he let things take their chance, as was his custom, trusting to fortune to bring about a good result, and philosophically convinced, that if the blind goddess did not choose to do so, it was not in his power to make her. During the evening he had once or twice shown some slight symptoms of uneasiness when he looked round and remarked his guest's absence; he had scolded his daughter a little, too, for not singing as well as usual; and, to say the truth, she had deserved it; for, whether the story told by the gentlemen on their return from the dining-room had frightened her—it not being customary at Tarningham-house to have shots fired through the windows—or whether it was that she was uneasy at Captain Hayward's prolonged absence, she certainly did not do her best at the piano. Sing as ill as she would, however, Mary Clifford, who sang with her, kept her in countenance. Now Mary was a very finished musician, with an exceedingly rich, sweet-toned voice, flexible, and cultivated in a high degree, with which she could do anything she chose; so that it was very evident

that she either did not choose to sing well, or else that she was thinking of something else.

But to return to Sir John. Perhaps, if we could look into all the dark corners of his heart—those curious little pigeon-holes that are in the breast of every man, containing all the odd crotchets and strange feelings and sensations, the unaccountable perversities, the whimsical desires and emotions, which we so studiously conceal from the common eye—it is not at all improbable that we should find a certain degree of satisfaction, a comfort, a relief, derived by the worthy baronet, from the unusual events which had chequered and enlivened that evening. Before dinner, he had looked forward to the passing of the next six or seven hours with some degree of apprehension; he had thought it would be monstrous dull, with all the proprieties and decorums which he felt called upon to maintain before his sister; and the excitement of the interview with Mr. Wittingham, the examination of Stephen Gimlet, and the unaccountable disappearance of Ned Hayward, supplied the vacancy occasioned by the absence of the bottle and jest. Soon after the gentlemen had entered the drawing-room, Sir John placed his niece and his daughter at the piano, and

engaged Dr. Miles, his sister, and even Mr. Beauchamp in a rubber at whist; and though from time to time he turned round his head to scold Isabella for singing negligently, yet he contrived to extract amusement from the game, —laughing, talking, telling anecdotes, commenting upon the play of his partner and his opponents, and turning everything into jest and merriment. Thus passed the evening to the hour I have mentioned, when Mrs. Clifford rose and retired to bed; and the first exclamation of Sir John, after she was gone, was that which I have recorded.

“It is strange, indeed,” said Beauchamp, in reply; “but you know his habits better than I do, and can better judge what has become of him.”

“Indeed, my dear uncle,” said Miss Clifford, with an earnest air, “I think you ought to make some inquiries. I do not believe Captain Hayward would have gone away in so strange a manner, without some extraordinary motive, and after the alarming circumstance that has happened to-night, one cannot well be without apprehension.”

“A harum-scarum fellow!” answered Sir John; “nobody ever knew what he would do

next. Some wild-goose scheme of his or another ; I saw him once jump off the Mole at Gibraltar, when he was a mere boy, to save the life of a fellow who had better have been drowned : a sneaking Spanish thief, half-smuggler and half-spy."

"And did he save him?" exclaimed Miss Clifford, eagerly.

"Oh, to be sure!" answered Sir John ; "he swims like a Newfoundland dog, that fellow."

"Your carriage, sir," said a servant, entering and addressing Mr. Beauchamp.

"Here, Jones," cried Sir John Slingsby ; "do you know what has become of Captain Hayward? We have not seen him all night."

"Why, Sir John," answered the man, "Ralph, the under-groom, told me he had met the Captain in the park, as he was returning from taking your note to Mr. Wharton, and that Captain Hayward made him get down, jumped upon the cob, and rode away out at the gates as hard as he could go."

"There, I told you so," said Sir John Slingsby ; "Heaven only knows what he is about, and there is no use trying to find it out ; but this is too bad of you, Mr. Beauchamp, ordering your carriage at this hour. The days

of curfew are passed, and we can keep the fire in a little after sundown."

"You should stay and see what has become of your friend, Mr. Beauchamp," said Isabella Slingsby. "I don't think that is like a true companion-in-arms, to go away and leave him, just when you know he is engaged in some perilous adventure."

Beauchamp was not proof against such persuasions; but we are all merchants in this world, trafficking for this or that, and sometimes bartering things that are of very little value to us in reality for others that we value more highly. Beauchamp made it a condition of his stay, that Isabella should go on singing; and Mary Clifford engaged her uncle in a *tête-à-tête*, while Beauchamp leaned over her cousin at the piano. The first song was scarcely concluded, however, when the butler again made his appearance, saying,—

"You were asking, Sir John, what had become of Captain Hayward, and Stephen Gimlet has just come in to say that he saw him about an hour ago."

"Well, well," said Sir John, impatiently, "what the devil has become of him?—what bat-fowling expedition has he gone upon now?"

By Jove! that fellow will get his head broken some of these days; and then we shall discover whether there are any brains in it or not. Sometimes, I think there is a great deal, sometimes that there is none at all; but, at all events, he is as kind, good-hearted a fellow as ever lived—that's certain."

"Stephen Gimlet says, Sir John," replied the butler, with his usual solemnity, "that the captain went out on horseback, to hunt down the man who fired through the window."

"Whew!" whistled Sir John Slingsby; "was it not one of those cursed fools of gamekeepers, shooting a deer?"

"No, Sir John," answered the man, "it was some one who came in on horseback by the upper gates. Captain Hayward got upon the cob, and hunted him across the moor, till he lodged him in one of the pits on the other side, and was watching him there by the moonlight when Stephen Gimlet came up; for he was afraid, if he went in one way, that he might get out the other."

"Well, have they got him?—have they got him?" cried Sir John. "By Jove! this is too bad; one must have his plate made bomb-proof, if this is to go on."

"They have not got him, please you, Sir John," replied the butler; "for when Stephen came up, he and the Captain went in, and both got close up to the fellow, it seems, but he had time to charge his gun, and he fired straight at them. Wolf—that is, Mr. Gimlet—says he is sure Captain Hayward is wounded; but the man rode away as hard as he could go before they could stop him, and the Captain jumped upon the cob, and went after him again at the full gallop."

"Where did they go? which way did they take?" exclaimed the baronet, bustling up warmly; "by Jove! this is too bad, it must be put down! Tell Matthews and Harrison, and two or three more to get out horses as fast as possible. Which way did they take?—can't you answer?—have you got no ears?"

"Stephen said, sir, that they seemed to go towards Buxton's inn," replied the butler; "but he could not well see, for they got in amongst the woods."

"By Jove! I'll soon settle this matter," cried Sir John; "I'll just get on a pair of boots, and be off—Mr. Beauchamp you must stay till I come back,—so come, be friendly, send away your carriage, and take a bed."

“Upon one condition, Sir’ John,” replied Beauchamp, “that you allow me to be the companion of your ride.”

“No, no !” cried Sir John, rubbing his hands, “my dear fellow, you must stay and protect the ladies.”

“Oh, we shall do very well, papa,” cried Isabella; “only order all the doors and windows to be shut, and I will command in camp till your return.”

“There’s a hero !” cried Sir John Slingsby; “agreed ! Jones, Jones, you dog, tell the boy to take away his horses, and not to come for Mr. Beauchamp till this time to-morrow night—nay, I insist, Beauchamp—no refusal, no refusal—capital haunch of venison, just ready for the spit—bottle of Burgundy, and all very proper—everything as prim as my grandmother’s maiden aunt—but come along, I’ll equip you for your ride—ha, ha, ha, capital fun, by Jove ! Ned Hayward’s a famous fellow to give us such a hunt extempore ; as good as a bagged fox, and a devil a deal better than a drag.”

Thus saying, Sir John Slingsby rolled out of the room, followed by Mr. Beauchamp, to prepare themselves for their expedition, from

a vast store of very miscellaneous articles, which the baronet's dressing-room contained. He was, Heaven knows, anything but a miser, and yet in that dressing-room were to be found a multitude of old suits of clothes and equipments of different kinds, which he had possessed at every different period, from twenty to hard upon the verge of sixty; jack-boots, dress pumps, hob-nailed shoes, Hessians, and pen-dragons, great coats, small coats, suits of regimentals, wrap-rascals, the complete costume of a harlequin, which now would barely have held one of his thighs, and a mask and domino. But with each of these pieces of apparel was connected some little incident, or tale, or jest, which clung lingering to the old gentleman's memory, associating with occurrences sweet, or joyous, or comic; sometimes even with sad events, but always with something that touched one or other of the soft points in his heart; and he never could make up his mind to part with them. From these he would have fain furnished his guest with a wardrobe, but unfortunately the Baronet and Mr. Beauchamp were of very different sizes, and he laughingly put away the pair of boots that were offered, saying, "No, no, Sir John,

my shoes will do very well; I have ridden in every sort of foot-covering under the sun, I believe, from wooden boots to morocco leather slipper; but I will take this large cloak that is hanging here, in case we should have to bivouac."

"Ha, ha, ha!" cried Sir John again; "a capital notion; I should not mind it at all—light a great fire on the top of the moor, turn our toes in, and put a bundle of heath under our heads—we have got capital heath here. Were you ever in Scotland, Mr. Beauchamp?"

"I was, sir, once," answered Beauchamp, in a tone so stern and grave, that Sir John Slingsby suddenly looked up, and saw the countenance of his guest clouded and gloomy, as if something exceedingly offensive or painful had just been said to him. It cleared up in a moment, however, and as soon as the baronet was ready they issued forth again, and descended into the hall.

In the meanwhile, Isabella and her cousin had remained sitting near the piano, both rather thoughtful in mood. For a minute or two each was silent, busied apparently with separate trains of thought. At length, Mary looked up, inquiring, "What do you intend to do, Isabella?"

"What do you mean, Mary, love?" replied her cousin; "if you mean to ask whether I intend to marry Ned Hayward, as I have a slight notion papa intends I should, I say No at once;" and she laughed gaily.

"Oh, no," answered Miss Clifford; "my question was not half so serious a one, Isabella; though I do not see why you should not, either. I only wished to ask whether you intended to sit up or go to bed."

"Why I should not marry Ned Hayward," exclaimed Isabella, gaily, "I can give you twenty good reasons in a minute. We are both so thoughtless; we should ruin ourselves in a couple of years; we are both so merry, we should laugh ourselves to death in a fortnight; we are both so harum-scarum, as papa calls it, that it would not be safe for one to trust the other out of his sight; for a thousand to one we should never meet again; he would go to the East Indies, and I to the West seeking him; and then each would go to meet the other, and we should pass each other by the way."

Mary Clifford smiled thoughtfully; and after pausing in meditation for a moment or two, she answered, "After all, Isabella, I have some

doubts as to whether either of you is as thoughtless as you take a pleasure in seeming."

"Oh, you do me injustice—you do me injustice, Mary," cried Miss Slingsby; "I seem nothing but what I am. As to Captain Hayward," she added, with a sly smile, "you know best, Mary, dear. He is your *preux chevalier*, you know; delivered you from lions and tigers, and giants and ravishers, and, as in duty bound, has talked to nobody but you all day."

Mary coloured a little, but replied straightforwardly, "Oh, yes, we have talked a good deal, enough to make me think that he is not so thoughtless as my uncle says; and I know you are not so thoughtless as you say you are yourself. But what do you intend to do while they are gone?"

"Oh, I shall sit up, of course," answered Isabella; "I always do, till papa goes to bed. When he has a large party, and I hear an irruption of the Goths and Vandals making its way hither—which I can always discover by the creaking of the glass door—I retreat into that little room and fortify myself with lock and key, for I have no taste for mankind in a state of drunkenness; and then when they have roared and bellowed, and laughed, and

quarrelled, and drank their coffee, and gone away, I come out and talk to papa for half an hour, till he is ready to go to bed."

"But is he always in a very talking condition himself?" asked Mary Clifford.

"Oh, fie now, Mary," exclaimed her cousin; "how can you suffer your mind to be prejudiced by people's reports. My father likes to see every one happy, and even jovial under his roof—perhaps a little too much—but if you mean to say he gets tipsy, it is not the case; I never saw him the least so in all my life; in fact, I don't think he could if he would; for I have seen him drink as much wine as would make me tipsy twenty times over, without its having any effect upon him at all—a little gay, indeed; but he is always gay after dinner."

Mary Clifford listened with a quiet smile, but replied not to Isabella's discourse upon her father's sobriety, merely saying, "Well, if you sit up, my dear cousin, I shall sit up too, to keep you company;" but scarcely had the words passed her sweet lips, when in came Sir John Slingsby and Mr. Beauchamp, the baronet holding a note open in his hand.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he cried; "news of the deserter, news of the deserter, we had just got to

the hall door, horses ready, cloaks on our backs, servants mounted, plans arranged, a gallop of five or six miles and a bivouac on the moor before us, when up walks one of the boys from Buxton's inn with this note from the runaway; let us see what he says," and approaching the lamp, he read by its light several detached sentences from Ned Hayward's letter, somewhat to the following effect: "Dear Sir John,—For fear you should wonder what has become of me—(so I did, by Jove)—I write this to tell you—(ah, I knew all that before)—cantered him across the common—earthed him in an old sand-pit—rascal fired at me—not much harm done—chased him along the road, but lost him at the three turnings—came on here—very tired—comfortable quarters—particular reason for staying where I am—over with you early in the morning.—Ned Hayward."

"Ah, very well—very well!" continued Sir John; "that's all right; so now, Beauchamp, if you are for a game at piquet, I am your man; if not, some wine and water and then to bed. I'll put you under the tutelage of my man Galveston, who knows what's required by every sort of man in the world, from the grand Turk

down to the Methodist parson, and he will provide you with all that is necessary."

Mr. Beauchamp, however, declined both piquet and wine-and-water; and, in about half an hour, the whole party had retired to their rooms; and gradually Tarningham Hall sank into silence and repose.

One of the last persons who retired to rest was Sir John Slingsby himself; for, before he sought his own room, he visited the library, and there, lying on the table where his letters were usually placed, he found a note, neatly folded and sealed, and directed in a stiff, clear, clerk-like hand. He took it up and looked at it; laid it down again: took it up once more; held it, for at least three minutes, in his hand, as if irresolute whether he should open it or not; and at length tore open the seal, exclaiming—

"No, hang me if I go to bed with such a morsel on my stomach."

Then, putting it on the other side of the candle, and his glass to his eye, he read the contents. They did not seem to be palatable; for the first sentence made him exclaim—

"Pish! I know you, my buck!"

After that he read on again; and, though he made no further exclamation, his brow became cloudy, and his eye anxious. When he had done, he threw it down, put his hands behind his back, and walked two or three times up and down the room, stopping every now and then to gaze at the Turkey carpet.

"Hang him!" he cried at length. "By Jove! this is a pretty affair."

And then he walked up and down again.

"Well, devil take it!" he cried, at length, tearing the note to pieces, and throwing the fragments into the basket under the table, "it will come, some how or other, I dare say. There is always something turns up—if not, the trees must go—can't be helped—improve the prospect—landscape gardening—ha! ha! ha!"

And laughing heartily, he rolled off to bed.

CHAPTER IV.

THE morning sky was very gray. There was a thin film of vapour over the greater part of the heavens, retarding, as it were, the advance of dawn, as a mother keeps back her wayward child struggling forward too fast upon all the varied ways of life. Yet towards the east there was a bright streak of gold, which told that the star of light, and warmth, and genial influences, was coming up rapidly from below the round edge of the rolling ball. It was a line, defined and clear, marked out from the vapour, which ended there in an edge of lighter yellow; and as the strong golden tints became more and more intense, the filmy cloud split and divided into fragments of strange shapes,

while the beams streamed through, and, passing across the wide extent of air, tinted with purple the dewy canopy above. Towards that glowing streak all things seemed to turn; the sunflower inclined her head thither; the lark bent his flight in that direction; towards it all the songsters of the wood seemed to pour the voices of their choir. It is a strange thing, the east; full of curious associations with all the marvellous history of man. Every good thing, and almost every bright thing, has come from the east; religion, salvation's hope; daylight, and the seeming movement of the stars and moon; summer, and sunshine, and civilization have sprung thence, as if there were the fountain of all the best gifts to man. There have all nations risen, and still the progress is from the East towards the West; as if there were some law, by which all things on the earth followed the course of the great light-giver. Nevertheless, how have these blessings been mingled with many evils! The cutting winds of spring and winter, pestilence and destruction, earthquakes and wars, have there arisen, to sweep over the world, and blacken it with grief and mourning. It is a strange place, the east; and I can never look towards it and see

the rising sun, without a strange feeling of awe and mystery, from the various associations which exist between it and the wonders of the past.

The scene from the windows of Tarningham Hall was not a very extensive one, but it was fine in its peculiar character : the sweeps of the park ; the dewy lawns ; the large old trees ; the broad and feathery fern ; the stately deer, walking along with unconfirmed steps and half-awakened deliberation ; the matutinal hares, scudding about in the gray twilight ; and the squirrels, rushing from tree to tree ; were all pleasant to the eye that looked upon them, though that eye could only at one small point, where a break in the wood gave a wider view, catch anything beyond the domain, and all that even there was gained, consisted of a narrow portion of that same streak of yellow light, which broke the monotonous curtain of the cloud towards the east.

Nevertheless, for several minutes, Mary Clifford gazed upon the whole with pleasure and interest. She was early in her habits ; a familiar child of the morning ; and the dew on the leaves was a delight to her ; the soft gray of the early day, a sort of invitation to contem-

plation and enjoyment. After marking the deer, and smiling at the sportive gambols of the hares, who, as it was forbidden to shoot near the house, played fearlessly on the lawns, she turned her eyes towards the spot where the dawning morning-light was visible, and recollecting that not far from the house, on what was called the terrace, there was a point whence the whole scene over the country was visible, and where she could watch, with uninterrupted pleasure, all the effects of the breaking day upon that beautiful landscape, she sallied forth to enjoy a peculiar sort of pleasure, which requires a very pure and unsullied mind, and a heart naturally elevated and devout, to understand it fully.

The hour was a very early one; for, at that season of the year, Dan Phœbus, as the ancient poets call him, shaking off the lazy habits of the winter, gets up betimes; and, as the servants of good Sir John Slingsby were not subjected to very severe discipline, not a single soul in the house was up to give our sweet friend exit. There is always a curious sensation in walking alone through a house, all the other tenants of which are still sleeping; there is a deathly feeling about it; a severing of the ties, which

so lately existed between us and those who are now insensible ; but that sensation is most strongly felt, when the morning sunshine is on the world ; when nature has revived, or is reviving from the trance of night, and other things are busy in restless activity, though the gay companions of a few hours gone by are silent and still, as if death had struck them.

Down the broad oak stairs, with its narrow strip of carpet, along the old marble hall with its tessellated floor, Mary Clifford went slowly and quietly, lighted alone by a skylight overhead, and a large window over the great doors ; but she could hear the gay birds singing without ; the thrush upon the tree top ; the woodlark in the shade ; the linnet, with its small, sweet song, and the chaffinch in his spring dress and his spring notes amongst the bushes. She opened the door of the library and went in, leaving it unclosed behind her, then unbarred and unlocked the glass door, and went out and gazed about her. Some deer that were near the house started and withdrew a few steps, and then paused to stare at her ; but whether it was that they had never seen any of their companions slaughtered by a being in a woman's dress, or that they thought she

looked, as she really did, sweet and gentle as the morning, they did not take fright, trotting a few steps farther, after a long look, and then stopping with their heads together to converse over the matter.

After closing the door, Mary walked on towards the terrace, which was at the distance of about a couple of hundred yards, climbed the steps and proceeded towards the end, where the finest view was to be obtained, at a spot sheltered by six rugged yews, underneath which there was a seat: and there she paused, for at least ten minutes, drinking in the beauty of the scene, as it assumed a thousand different hues under the influence of the rising sun. All was still and tranquil; but at length she heard some voices speaking, and looked in the direction in which they came.

"Some of the grooms," she thought, as her eyes rested on the stables at some little distance in the rear of the house; and although it was not at all probable that they would disturb her reveries, yet she walked slowly part of the way back, for one half of the pleasure which she derived from her early walk lay in its solitude. She was wishing that the grooms had thought fit to lie in bed for half an hour longer, when

she heard, proceeding from the lower ground under the bank of the terrace, the light and rapid footfalls of some one apparently walking from the stables to the mansion; and, not at all wishing to meet any one, she turned back again towards the yews. At the end of the terrace, however, the footsteps stopped; there was a momentary pause, and then they mounted the steps and came along the gravel towards her. Mary walked on to the end, and then turned, when straight before her appeared Captain Hayward, coming on with his usual light and cheerful air, though the sleeve of his coat was cut open, and it was evident that he had bandages round his arm.

“Good morning, good morning, Miss Clifford,” he said, advancing frankly, and taking her hand; “what a magnificent morning! I see you are as early in your habits as myself. But did you ever see such a rich dove-colour as that which has come upon those clouds? I love some of these calm gray mornings, with the promise of a bright day they give, better far than those skies all purple and gold, such as are described by that rhodomontade fellow, Marmontel, in his ‘Incas,’ which are always sure to end in clouds and rain. I have always

thought those very bright mornings like a dashing woman of fashion, tricked out in her best smiles and her brightest colours, promising all sorts of things with her eyes, which she does not intend to perform, and cold or frowning before half an hour is over."

"And the gray morning, Captain Hayward," asked Mary, with a smile, "what is that like?"

"Oh, I don't know," answered Captain Hayward, laughing; "you must not drive my imagination too hard, dear lady, lest it stumble. Perhaps the gray morning is like a calm, quiet, well brought-up country girl, with a kind heart under the tranquil look, which will give a long day of sunshine after its first coolness is passed."

Mary Clifford cast down her eyes, and did not answer; but, as she was walking on towards the house, Ned Hayward continued, in his usual straightforward way: "You must not go in yet, my dear Miss Clifford; I want you to take a turn or two with me upon this delightful terrace. You must, indeed, for I have got a thousand things to say, and I know I shall find nobody else to say them to for the next two or three hours."

His fair companion did not think fit to refuse, though some prudish people might have thought it a little improper to take a walk at five o'clock in the morning with a young captain of infantry unattached; but Mary Clifford had only known Captain Hayward six-and-thirty hours, and therefore she saw nothing in the least improper in it in the world. Young ladies who guard so very scrupulously against being made love to, forget that they show what they expect. She turned, therefore, with him at once, and replied, "You must, indeed, have a long series of adventures to tell us. I am delighted to forestall the rest of the family, and to have the news myself three hours before any one. We were all in great alarm about you last night. My uncle and Mr. Beauchamp, and half-a-dozen servants, were setting out to seek you, upon the report of Stephen Gimlet, as they call him, the father of the little boy you saved; but your note just arrived in time to stop them."

"Oh, then, Master Gimlet, I suppose, has told my story for me?" said Ned Hayward.

"Only very briefly," answered the young lady; "he said you had chased some man

over the common, who had fired at you, and he was afraid had wounded you; and I fear, from what I see, he was right."

"Oh, it was nothing—nothing at all!" replied Ned Hayward; "but I'll tell you all about it as circumstantially as a newspaper;" and he went on in a gay and lively tone to give an account of his adventures of the preceding night, till his arrival at Buxton's inn. Sometimes he made Mary Clifford laugh, sometimes look grave and apprehensive, but he always interested her deeply in his tale; and she showed that she had marked one part particularly, by asking, "Then, did you know the man when you saw his face so distinctly in the pit?"

"Up to that moment, I thought I did," replied her companion, "but then I saw I was utterly mistaken. I will acknowledge to you, my dear Miss Clifford, that, till he turned round, I fancied he was one I had seen before—the same height, the same make; but, under existing circumstances, I felt that nothing would justify me in giving up the pursuit, although it was most painful to me, I assure you, to follow, with the purpose of punishing, a young gentleman in whom, from what you

said yesterday at dinner, I conceive you take a considerable interest."

"Who? Mr. Wittingham?" exclaimed Mary Clifford, her face turning as red as scarlet. "Oh, Captain Hayward, you are mistaken! I take no interest in him, I abhor him; or, at least—at least, I dislike him very much."

Ned Hayward looked puzzled; and he really was so in a considerable degree. His own prepossessions had done something to mislead him; and a man never conceives a wrong opinion, but a thousand small circumstances are sure to arise to confirm it. A man may long for green figs, but in any country but England he will not get them in the month of March; he may desire grapes, but he cannot find them in May; but if he have a suspicion of any kind, he will meet with, whenever he likes, all sorts of little traits and occurrences to strengthen it; for the only fruit that is ripe in all seasons is corroborative evidence; and, amongst the multitude of events that are ever in the market of life, it must be a hard case if he do not find enough of it. After a moment given to consideration, he replied more cautiously than might have been expected. "I have somehow mistaken you, my dear

lady," he said, at length, "and such mistakes may be dangerous. I have no right to force myself into your confidence; but really the whole of this affair is becoming serious. When first I had the pleasure of seeing you, I found you subjected to what was certainly a great outrage. I call it so; for I am perfectly certain that you yourself must have considered it as such; and there could not even be a palliation for it, except——" he paused an instant, and then added, gravely, "except love on both sides, disappointed by objections arising in the prejudices of others."

Mary Clifford coloured deeply, but suffered him to proceed. "I need not tell you, after what I have said," he continued, "that I have recognised and identified the principal person concerned in this business. At dinner you expressed a very strong desire that the offender should not be punished; but the former offence was followed by a very serious crime. A shot was fired last night into your uncle's dining-room, amidst a party of gentlemen quietly drinking their wine, which very nearly struck the father of the very man who had already rendered himself amenable to the laws of his country by his attack upon you. I had sus-

picious that he was the perpetrator of this crime, and although, as it turned out, he certainly was not the person I pursued across the moor, yet I have some very strong reasons to think that he was a participator in the offence. These are all very serious circumstances, my dear young lady; but I am ignorant of those which have preceded these events, and if without pain to yourself you could give me any explanations which might guide my mind to the causes of all that has occurred, it might be very serviceable in many respects. I am sure you will answer me frankly, if it be possible; and believe me, I am not one to act harshly, or to abuse your confidence—nay, more, thoughtless as I may seem, and as I am called, be assured I will do nought without consideration and forethought.”

“I am sure you will not, Captain Hayward,” answered Mary Clifford, warmly—“quite sure; and I have no hesitation in giving you my confidence—though, indeed, I have very little to tell. These things are always unpleasant to speak about, and that is the only motive I could have for remaining silent; but this gentleman’s conduct has been so very public, that I am saved from all scruples on his account.

About two years ago, I met Mr. Henry Wittingham at the county ball, danced with him there, and observed nothing in his behaviour which should make me treat him differently from other new acquaintances. I did not think him agreeable, but he was not offensive. He asked me to dance again the same night, and I refused, but, shortly after, he was formally introduced at our house; my father asked him to dinner, and was, indeed, very kind both to him and to Mr. Wittingham his father, because he thought that they were unjustly looked down upon and treated coldly by the county gentry on account of their family. I soon began to find that—that—I really do not well know how to go on—but that this young gentleman's visits were more frequent than was pleasant, and that he always contrived to be near me, especially when we met in public. His conversation, his manners, as I knew more of him, became insupportably disagreeable; I tried as much as I could to avoid him, to check his advances, at first quietly, but decidedly without speaking to any one else, for I did not wish to produce any breach between my father and Mr. Wittingham; but, at last, I found that he made a parade and a boast of his intimacy, and

then I thought it best to speak both to mamma, and my dear father. What was done I really do not know; but certainly something took place which very much enraged both father and son, and the latter was forbidden to visit at our house. The result was anything but deliverance from his persecution. From that moment he chose to assume, that the objection was on the side of my parents, and I cannot tell you how I have been annoyed. I have not ventured to walk out alone, for although once when I met him in the village, I told him plainly my sentiments towards him, he still persisted in the most unpleasant manner, that I spoke alone from mamma's dictation, and for months he used to hang about the place, till I really grew nervous at the sight of every human being whom I did not instantly recognise. This last outrage has been worse than all; and I will admit that it deserves punishment; but I am afraid, from various circumstances which accompanied it, that the law, if carried into effect, would punish it too severely. My uncle declared he would hang the man if he could catch him; and oh, think, Captain Hayward, what a horrible reflection that would ever be to me through life, to think that I had been even the

innocent cause of bringing a fellow-creature to a disgraceful death."

"Painful, indeed, I do not doubt;" answered Ned Hayward, "but yet——"

"Nay, nay," cried Mary, "do not say *but yet*, Captain Hayward. I could never make up my mind to give evidence against him; and, to speak selfishly, the very fact of having to appear in a court of justice, and of having my name in public newspapers, would render the punishment nearly as great to me as to him. These were my sole motives, I can assure you, in what I said yesterday, and not the slightest personal interest in one who has, I am afraid, in all situations disgraced himself."

For some reason or another, Ned Hayward was glad to hear Mary Clifford defend herself, and so warmly too, from the imputation of any feeling of regard for Harry Wittingham; but he took care not to show, to its full extent, all the pleasure that he felt.

"I thought it strange, indeed," he said, "that you should entertain any great feeling of esteem for a person who certainly seemed to me not worthy of it; but there are often circumstances, my dear Miss Clifford, unseen by the general eye, which endear two people to each other,

who seem the most dissimilar—youthful companionship, services rendered, old associations—a thousand things build up, between persons the least likely to assimilate, ties which are stronger than all opposing principles. I thought that such might be the case with you; but as it is not, let me tell you what was the end of my adventure last night; and then you will see what cause I have for suspicion. I must inform you, in the first instance, that I marked the person of Mr. Henry Wittingham well on the evening of the attack, notwithstanding the twilight, and that I saw him yesterday in Tarningham. His father's unwillingness to enter into the charge, when made against some unknown person, excited suspicion; but I found afterwards, from other sources, that Mr. Wittingham and his son had quarrelled, and were completely at variance; and, in the justice-room, the young man whispered something to the old one, of which I heard only two or three words, but they were of a threatening nature. I have told you that I thought I recognised the figure of the man who fired the shot, and Stephen Gimlet declared he could swear the horse he rode was Henry Wittingham's; but I found, as I have said, that the

man in the pit was a stranger. When, after pursuing him as long as I had any trace, I at length arrived at a place called, I find, Buxton's Inn, I saw the very horse in the stable, in a state which left no doubt that it had been ridden hard for several hours, and had not been in five minutes. I inquired for the master, and was told the number of the room where he was to be found. I walked straight in and found Mr. Henry Wittingham sitting quietly at supper. Some conversation ensued, in the course of which I told him the cause of my intrusion; and his whole manner was confused and agitated. He swore violently at the idea of anybody having ridden his horse, and affected not to believe it; but I made him come down to the stable, when, of course, his mouth was closed."

"But who did ride it, then?" exclaimed Miss Clifford.

"Nay, that I cannot tell," answered Ned Hayward; "but I resolved to wait at the inn and see if I could discover anything. I was shown into a very neat little sitting-room, and wrote a note to your uncle, Sir John, while they were getting my coffee. It was now nearly ten o'clock, and there was a room apparently

similar to my own on each side of me, with a door of communication with either. I suppose they were locked so as to prevent the passage of anything very fat or corporeal from one room into the other, but certainly were not so well closed as to exclude all sound. It may seem a strange thing for me, my dear Miss Clifford, to give you an account of the sitting-rooms of an inn; but so much depends in this world upon what is called juxta-position, that very important events have depended upon the keyhole of a door. You must not suppose, however, that I made use of either of the keyholes in my room for the laudable and honourable purpose of eaves-dropping; on the contrary, I spoke loud enough to the waiter to give sufficient notice to my neighbours, if I had any, that voices were distinguishable from one room to the other; and it would seem that Mr. Henry Wittingham, who was on the left hand side, was determined to impress me not only with the same fact, but also with a notion that he was in a towering passion on account of the usage his horse had met with; for he cursed and swore very severely, to which the waiter, or whoever he spoke to, did not reply. There seemed to be nobody on the other side, for

about half an hour, when, as I was sitting at my coffee, after having despatched my note, I heard steps come up from below, a door open, and the voice of the waiter say most respectfully, 'I will tell the Captain you are here, Mr. Wharton.'"

"Was it Mr. Wharton, the lawyer?" exclaimed Mary, with some degree of eagerness.

"I really cannot tell," answered Ned Hayward; "but I suspect it was, from what passed afterwards. All was silent for about three minutes, except when I heard a step walking up and down the room. As your uncle had mentioned Mr. Wharton's name more than once in the course of yesterday, I fancied he might have come upon business to some one, which there was no necessity for my hearing; and, therefore, I rattled the cups and saucers, moved about the chair, tumbled over a footstool, and left them to take their own course."

"Mr. Wharton is a very shrewd man," said Mary Clifford, "and one I should think a hint would not be thrown away upon."

"He did not choose to take mine, however," replied Ned Hayward; "for, at the end of a few minutes, some one seemed to join him, saying, in a loud and familiar tone, 'Ha! how

do you do, Wharton?—Very glad to see you again! I hope you have brought me some money.’”

“Was it Mr. Wittingham’s voice?” asked Miss Clifford.

“Oh, dear, no,” replied Captain Hayward; “one quite of a different tone; a good deal of the same swaggering insolence in it, but, to my fancy, there was more bold and dogged determination. Every now and then there was a small pause, too, before a word was pronounced, which one generally finds in the speech of a cunning man; but yet there was a sort of sneering persiflage in the words, which I have more generally met with in the empty-headed coxcombs of fashion, who have nothing to distinguish them but impertinence and a certain position in society. However, it could not be Mr. Wittingham, for him this lawyer must have known very well, and his reply was,—‘Indeed, Captain Moreton, I have not; but I thought it better to come over and answer your note in person, to see what could be done for you.’”

“Captain Moreton!” cried Mary; “I know who it is very well—not that I ever saw him, as far as I can remember; for he quitted this part of the country ten or twelve years ago,

when I was quite a child; but I have often heard my father say that he was a bad, reckless man, and had become quite an adventurer, after having broken his mother's heart, ruined his other parent, and abridged poor old Mr. Moreton's days. He died, quite in poverty, three years ago, after having sold his estate, or mortgaged it, or something of the kind, to this very Mr. Wharton, the attorney."

"Indeed!" said Ned Hayward, "that explains a great deal, my dear young lady. Where did this property lie?"

"Just beyond my uncle's—a little way on the other side of the moor," replied Miss Clifford.

Ned Hayward fell into a fit of thought, and did not reply for some moments; at length he said, with a laugh, "Well, I do not know that their conversation would interest you very much, though, in spite of all I could do, I heard a great part of it, and as for the rest, I must manage the best way I can myself."

"You are very tantalizing, Captain Hayward," said his fair companion, "and you seem to imply that I could aid in something. If I can, I think you are bound to tell me. Confidence for confidence, you know," and when she

had done, she coloured slightly, as if feeling that her words implied more than she meant.

"Assuredly," replied Ned Hayward; "but I only fear I might distress you."

"If what you say has reference to Mr. Wittingham," the young lady answered, raising her eyes to his face with a look of ingenuous frankness, "let me assure you, once for all, that nothing you can say will distress me if it do not imply that I feel something else than the coldest indifference."

"Nay, it does not refer to him at all," replied Ned Hayward, "but to one you love better."

"Indeed!" exclaimed his companion, her lip trembling with eagerness, "tell me—tell me, Captain Hayward! After what you have said, I must beg and entreat that you would."

"I will, then," answered Ned Hayward, gazing upon her with a look of admiration blended with sorrow at the pain he was about to inflict. "I believe, Miss Clifford, I am about to commit an indiscretion in mentioning this subject to you at all; for I do not know that you can assist materially; and yet it is something to have one to consult with—one, in whose generosity, in whose kindness, sympathy—ay, and good sense, too, I can fully trust.

Besides, you know, I dare say, all the people in the neighbourhood, and may give me some serviceable hints."

"But speak—speak!" said Miss Clifford, pausing in their walk up and down the terrace, as she saw that he fought round a subject which he thought would distress her, with a timid unwillingness to do so—"what is it you have to tell me?"

"Why, I very much fear, my dear young lady," answered Captain Hayward, "that your uncle is very much embarrassed—nay—why should I disguise the matter?—absolutely ruined."

Mary Clifford clasped her hands together, and was about to answer with an exclamation of sorrow and surprise; but I do believe that no person on earth was ever permitted to give an explanation uninterrupted. The fates are against it: at least, they were so in this instance; for just as Ned Hayward had uttered the last very serious words, they heard a light step tripping up behind them, and both turning suddenly round, beheld Miss Slingsby's French maid.

"Ah, Ma'amselle," she said, as soon as she reached them, "I saw you out in this early

morning without anything on, and so have brought you a shawl."

"Thank you, thank you, Minette," replied Mary, and as she was well accustomed to early walks, was about to decline the shawl; but, judging the quickest mode of getting rid of the maid would be to take it, she added, "Very well—give it to me," and cast it carelessly round her shoulders.

The maid would not be satisfied with that arrangement, however, adjusted it herself, showed how the ladies of Paris shawled themselves, and occupied full ten minutes, during which her poor victim remained in all the tortures of suspense.

As soon as the maid had taken herself away, Ned Hayward said, in a kind and feeling tone, "I fear I have distressed you much, Miss Clifford; let us walk quite to the other end, and talk over this matter: for I have only been hurried into revealing this painful fact by my anxiety to consult with some one as to the possibility, if not of remedying the existing evil, at least of preventing it from going further."

Mary walked on by his side in silence, with her hands clasped, and her eyes cast down

with a look of deep thought ; but at length she looked up, saying, in a tone of one communing with herself—"Is it possible? What! with his fine property! But how can it be, Captain Hayward?—here he is, with an estate of at least eight thousand a year in his own possession, to do with it what he chooses."

"To explain all, I had better tell you what I have heard," said her companion. "The tale may be false; I trust part of it is so; but a great part must be true; and the man spoke as if from authority. The first part of their conversation which I overheard was in a light tone; for a time the lawyer seemed to avoid grappling with the subject, and asked his companion after Madame, in not the most respectful manner. The Captain replied, she was very well, and in the other room; but pressed the lawyer to the point. He turned away again, and inquired whether Captain Moreton had been successful at the card-table lately. He answered, 'Tolerably; he had won a thousand pounds just before he came from London;' but then added, 'Come, come, Wharton, no bush-fighting; you know you owe me five hundred pounds, and I must have it.' To this the lawyer answered: 'No, indeed, Captain More-

ton, you are mistaken; I have told you so twice: the property was sold to a client of mine; and if I had chosen to send in my whole bill, your father would have been greatly my debtor, instead of me being yours. The sum given was fifty-four thousand pounds; forty thousand went to pay off the mortgage and your debts; twelve thousand your father had; and my bill, together with that of the solicitors of the opposite party, amounted in fact and reality to two thousand four hundred and seventy-two pounds. You recollect, I had not been paid for six years.'

"The next thing I heard," continued Ned Hayward, "was a loud laugh; and then Captain Moreton exclaimed, 'Your client, Wharton! very good—very good, indeed; you must think me exceedingly green: I know as well as possible who bought the property for two-thirds of its value,—employed other solicitors for a fictitious client,—pocketed one-half of their bill, and added thereto a bill of his own, which was more than the double of what he was entitled to. Come, come, sir; don't affect to sham a passion, for we have business to talk upon, and that of a serious kind. You are just going to sell the property again for the

full value; and before you do so, you shall disgorge a little.' The lawyer attempted to bluster, but unsuccessfully; for when he asked how Captain Moreton would stop him from selling the property, even if all he said were true, that worthy gentleman reminded him that his signature had been necessary to one of the papers; and then, when the attorney asserted it had been given, informed him, with a laugh, that the signature he had obtained was that of a marker at a billiard-table; the lawyer's clerk sent after him to Paris having been unacquainted with his person. Mr. Wharton attempted to show that it was of no consequence; but the matter so far ended by his giving a check for five hundred pounds, on Captain Moreton's signing another paper; which I suppose was drawn up in the room, for a silence succeeded for some minutes. A part of what took place then was not distinct; and I certainly made no effort to hear it."

"But my uncle," said Miss Clifford—"how does this affect my uncle?"

"He came upon the carpet next," replied Ned Hayward. "Captain Moreton asked who was going to buy the property; and when the lawyer made a mystery of it, saying that he

really did not know the true parties, but that Doctor Miles had meddled in the business, the other named Sir John as the probable purchaser. Thereat Mr. Wharton laughed heartily, and said, 'I'll tell you what, Captain, Sir John Slingsby is at this moment next thing to a beggar.'"

Mary put her hands before her eyes, and turned very pale.

"Forgive me, my dear Miss Clifford," continued Ned Hayward, "for repeating such unpleasant words; but it is better you should hear all. I will hasten, however:—Captain Moreton affected not to believe the tale; and then the lawyer went on to mention the facts. He stated that your uncle's property was mortgaged to the utmost extent; that the interest of two half years would be due in ten days; that notice of foreclosure had been given, and the time would expire before six weeks are over; that there are considerable personal debts, and that Sir John had written to him that very day, to get a further advance of ten thousand pounds, which was absolutely necessary to stave off utter ruin, even for a short time. Now I happen to know that Sir John did actually write to this man; and as Mr.

Wharton could have no object in deceiving the person he was speaking to, I fear the tale is too true."

"Good heavens! what is to be done?" exclaimed Mary Clifford. "Oh, Captain Hayward, how terrible it is to know this, and not to be able to assist!"

Captain Hayward paused a single instant, and then replied, with a look of deep feeling and interest, "Perhaps I ought not to have told you this, Miss Clifford," he said; "but I am a very thoughtless person, I am afraid; and yet I did not do this without thought, either. You know that I have a deep regard for your uncle; he was a very kind friend to me in days gone by: but having observed him well, and with that accuracy which, strange as it may seem to say, is only to be found in extreme youth, I know that it is perfectly in vain to talk with him on the subject of his embarrassments, unless at the very moments when they are the most pressing and severe. To talk with him then may be too late. He is one of those—and there are many of them—who, with a hopeful disposition, many resources in their own minds, and a happy faculty of banishing unpleasant thoughts, go on from one

difficulty to another, finding means, through a great part of life, of putting off the evil day,—and who, thinking the chapter of accidents inexhaustible, come suddenly to a full stop in the end, with all their resources gone, and no possible means of disentangling themselves from their embarrassments. It has been his constant axiom for twenty years, to my certain knowledge, that, *something would turn up*; and when such is the case, it is perfectly in vain to attempt to consult with a person so circumstanced as to the means of extricating him from difficulties, of which he always expects to be delivered by a lucky chance. Having found Fortune his best friend, he goes on trusting to her, till the fickle dame deserts him, and then looks around in bewilderment for assistance which cannot arrive.”

“Too true a picture—too true a picture!” replied Miss Clifford, in a sorrowful tone—“I have seen it myself, Captain Hayward, and have been grieved to see it.”

“Well, do not let us grieve, but act, my dear lady,” said Ned Hayward; “let us consult together, and see what can be done, for good Sir John must be saved at any cost.”

“But what can I do, Captain Hayward?” she

inquired. "Perhaps you do not know that the whole of my fortune is tied up by my father's will so strictly, that I can dispose of nothing till I have reached one-and-twenty years of age; and though I would willingly, most willingly, sacrifice anything to relieve my uncle, I am as powerless in this business as a child."

"This is unfortunate, indeed," said Ned Hayward, in reply—"very unfortunate. I had hoped that you had command of your own property, or that you might be able to point out some one, who would be able and willing to take this mortgage and relieve your uncle."

"I know of no one—no one on the earth," she answered; "my mother's is but a jointure; I am not of age for nine or ten months, and before that time it will be all over."

"The security is perfectly good," continued Ned Hayward in a musing tone, as if he had not heard her; "and I feel very sure that the property is worth a great deal more than this man has advanced, or any of his clients, as he calls them. Otherwise it would not have been done. We should easily find some one, I think, to take the mortgage, if we could but pay this interest and stop the foreclosure—

perhaps at a less per centage, too. That man is a rogue, I am sure, and we may very likely cut down a great many of the charges ; for I feel very certain he has been purposely entangling good Sir John, till at length, when he thinks there is no possibility of escape, he pounces upon him to devour him."

"But what is to be done?—what is to be done?" reiterated Miss Clifford.

"Well, it does not matter," said Captain Hayward, in the same thoughtful tone; "I'll tell you what we must do: I have a sum of sixteen thousand pounds in the funds. Ten thousand, it seems, will be wanted for the most pressing matters—we will call it twelve thousand ; for no man in your uncle's position reckons very closely what is needed, and his calculation is always below instead of above the mark. I will go up to town and sell out ; that will put off matters for six weeks or two months ; and, in the meantime, we must set all our wits to work for the purpose—first, of finding some one who will take the mortgage on reasonable terms ; and next, of putting your uncle's affairs altogether into order."

"Oh ! how can I thank you, Captain Hayward?" said Mary Clifford, putting her hand

upon his arm; "indeed, indèed, I am very grateful."

"Without the slightest occasion," replied Ned Hayward. "I wish to Heaven I had the means of taking the mortgage myself; but the fact is, my poor father—as good a man as ever lived—was too kind and too easy an one. He put me very early into what is called a crack-regiment, which, in plain English, means, I suppose, a regiment likely soon to be broken, or, at all events, likely to break those that enter it. I had my expensive habits, like the rest, and never fancied that I should not find five or six thousand a year, when I returned from Gibraltar at my father's death. Instead of that, I found the unentailed property totally gone; the entailed property was mine, as I was the last of my race. There were debts, however, to the amount of forty thousand pounds; and if I did not pay them, who would? The men would have had to go without their money; so I sold the property, paid the debts, put the little that remained, between fifteen and sixteen thousand pounds, in the funds, and have lived within my income ever since. Thus, you see, I have not the means of taking the mortgage."

Mary Clifford cast down her eyes, and was silent for a minute or two ; for there were very strong emotions at her heart—sincere respect and admiration ; more powerful, far, than they would have been had she conceived a high opinion of Ned Hayward's character at first, or if he had made a parade of his feelings and his actions. He treated it all so lightly, however, so much as a matter of course, both what he had done, and what he was about to do, that many an ordinary-minded person would have taken it on his own showing, and thought it a matter of course, too. But Mary Clifford was not an ordinary-minded person, and she felt deeply.

“But what will you do yourself, Captain Hayward?” she said, at length ; “my uncle will be long before he is able to repay you, and the want of this sum may be a serious inconvenience to you, I fear.”

“Oh ! dear, no,” replied Ned Hayward, with the easiest air in the world ; “I shall have four thousand pounds left, which will enable me to get upon full pay again, and, though this is a sad peaceful time we are in, I may have some opportunity afforded me. I had held this sum, which I put by, quite sacred, and would never

touch a farthing of it, though I was very much tempted once or twice to buy a fine horse or a fine picture ; but cut off as I am, my dear Miss Clifford, by my want of fortune, from forming those ties which are the comfort and happiness of latter years to most men, I may as well go and serve my country to the best of my power, as linger out my days in hunting, and shooting, and fishing, reading poetry, and looking at pictures. Sir John will pay me when he can, I know ; for he will look upon it as a debt of honour ; and, if he never can, why, it can't be helped. At all events, I do not wrong my heirs, for I have got none ;" and he laughed right cheerfully.

Mary Clifford looked in his face with a smile ; it was a sort of philosophy so new to her, so good, so generous, so self-devoted, and yet so cheerful, that she felt strongly infected by it. She had been bred up amongst people and by people equally good, equally generous in all great things, but somewhat rigid in smaller ones ; severe, if not stern ; grave, if not harsh ; and they had committed the sorrowful mistake of thinking, and of trying to teach her to think, that true piety is not cheerful. Her father had been the person from

whose breast this spring of chilling waters had been welled forth; and Mary's mother, though originally of a gay and happy disposition, had been very much altered by the petrifying influence of the stream. The contrast, too, in Mrs. Clifford's case, between her brother and her husband; the one whom she might love, but could not respect; the other, whom she loved and respected—nay, somewhat feared—tended to clench the mistake which the dean had striven to implant; and to make her believe that cheerfulness and folly, if not vice, were companions rarely separate. Mary Clifford saw the mistake now, though her own heart had told her long before that an error existed somewhere. But she felt, at the same time, that she also had a part to play towards one who sacrificed so much for the nearest relation she had except her mother; and with a beaming smile upon her lips, she said:—

“Captain Hayward, I shall never forget your conduct this day; but, at the same time, you must not run any risk, nor be any loser. If I had any power over my own fortune, I would do what you are now kind enough to do; but, at all events, I give you my word, that, the moment I am of age, I will repay you.”

“Oh, I dare say Sir John will do that,” answered Ned Hayward; “but, at all events, my dear young lady, pray say nothing to him on this subject till the last moment. We must let the matter press him very hard before he will hear reason; then, when he sees no means of escape whatever, he will consent that others shall find one for him. You had better talk to his daughter, but enjoin her to secrecy. If I have an opportunity, I will sound Beauchamp; I have a notion that he is rich; I feel very sure he is liberal and kind, and may take the mortgage if he finds it a reasonable security. That it is so, I am quite certain—nay, more, I am convinced, that if Sir John would let me manage all his affairs for him for one year, I would remove all his difficulties, and leave him a better income, in reality, than he has had for a long while. But now I must run away and leave you, for I see the people are getting up about the place, and I have two important pieces of business to do before noon.”

“Indeed,” said Mary, struck by something peculiar and indefinable in his manner; “I hope nothing unpleasant?”

“I will tell you what they are,” said Ned Hayward, in a gay tone; “and then you shall

judge for yourself. I have, first, to catch the largest trout in the river; I made a bet last night with your uncle that I would do so, and I always keep my engagements; and then I have to make ready for London to sell out this money."

"But need you go yourself?" said Miss Clifford, with a look of interest; "can you not send?"

"True, I can," said Ned Hayward; "I never thought of that—but yet, I had better go myself.—Good bye—good bye!" and he turned away. Then pausing for a moment, something which he struggled against got the better of him, and, coming back, he took Mary Clifford's hand in his, and pressed it gently, saying, "Farewell! There are some people, Miss Clifford, whose society is so pleasant, that it may become dangerous to one who must not hope to enjoy it long or often."

CHAPTER V.

“WHAT hour does the coach start at for London?”

“Half-past four, sir.”

“Arrives in town at twelve to-morrow, I think?”

“No, sir; last time I went up, we got there by eleven.”

“Then down again at half-past four?”

“Yes, sir—gets to the White Hart at half-past eleven—longer coming down than going up.”

“That will do very well.” And Ned Hayward, who had held the above conversation with one of Sir John Slingsby’s servants, hurried upstairs. His room was all in the

most exact order. His fishing-tackle, two fowling-pieces in their cases, shot-pouches, game-bags, powder-flasks, &c., were in array on the top of the drawers. His clothes were all in their separate places, his boots arranged under the dressing-glass, his writing-desk upon the table, flanked on either side by half-a-dozen volumes. Everything could be found in a moment, so that if called upon suddenly to march, the baggage would require no time to pack. It was to the writing-desk he first went, however; he opened it, unscrewed the top of the inkstand, took out a sheet of note-paper and a memorandum-book, and then sat down deliberately in the chair. The memorandum-book was first called into service, and in the column of accounts he put down what he had paid at the inn that morning, and then, on another page, wrote down the following list, which I will not attempt to explain.

“ Catch trout.

“ Write to H. W.

“ See Ste Gim.

“ Make inquiries.

“ Provide for boy.

“ Pack car. bag.

“ Coach to London.

“ Sell out 12,000*l*.

“ Alter will.

“ Pistols.

“ Friend—*qy*. Beauchamp.

“ Talk to him of No. 2 and No. 8.”

When this was done, he put the memorandum-book in the pocket of a frock-coat, sat down again, drew the sheet of note-paper towards him, and on it wrote as follows, with a bold, free, rapid hand.

“ Captain Hayward presents his compliments to Mr. Henry Wittingham, and begs to inform him that since he had the honour of seeing him last night, some business has occurred which compels him to go to London for a short time. He goes by the coach this day at half-past four, returns by the coach which leaves London at the same hour to-morrow, and expects to arrive at the White Hart by half-past eleven or twelve. If by that time Mr. Wittingham has found some gentleman of honour to appear as his friend, Captain Hayward will have much pleasure in seeing that gentleman at the White Hart any time between the arrival of the coach and one o'clock. If not, he will be found for about a fortnight at Tarningham-park.”

The note was then addressed and sealed,

and as soon as that was done, without a moment's pause, Ned Hayward threw off the dress-coat in which he was still habited, put on a sporting costume, looked through his book of flies, and taking fishing-rod and basket in one hand, and the note in the other, descended the stairs.

The house was now in the bustle of morning preparation; housemaids were sweeping, men-servants were taking away lamps and candlesticks, and to one of the latter the note was delivered, with a half-crown, and directions to send some lad immediately to Buxton's inn. That being done, Ned Hayward strolled out into the park, taking his way towards the stream, where we will join him by-and-by.

We must now return to Mary Clifford, however, who stood where Ned Hayward had left her in deep thought for several minutes. Had she been the least of an actress, she would not have done so, for she might have fancied that it would betray to her companion, as he walked away, what was passing in her mind; but Mary was not the least of an actress. Graceful by nature, lady-like and polished by heart and education, it had never been necessary for her to picture to her own imagination what others

would think of any of her movements or words. She was unaccustomed to do so. She never did it. She did not feel herself upon a stage ; she was never acting a part. How few there are of whom we can say the same ! But there she stood—silent, grave, and thoughtful, with Hayward's words still ringing in her ear, his manner still before her eyes ; and both had been somewhat marked and peculiar. But three minutes were all that she would give to such thoughts. They came upon her in confused crowds—so numerous, so busy, so tumultuous, that they frightened her ; and, not being very brave by nature, she ran away from them, to take refuge with the calmer but sterner meditations regarding her uncle's situation. What was to be done, and how it was to be done, were very puzzling questions, which she asked herself over and over again, without receiving any satisfactory reply from her own mind. Under the pressure of difficulties and dangers, whether affecting ourselves or those near and dear to us, there comes upon us a craving for action, a *cacoethes agendi*, which we can scarcely restrain. We cannot sit down quietly and wait for time and circumstances to present favourable opportunities, as we should

do when the affairs in our hands were but matters of indifference to ourselves; calm, business-like transactions, in which we have no personal feeling. The heart comes in at every turn, and perplexes all the fine plans of the head; and we must be up and doing, whether the moment be favourable, or not. Mary Clifford felt all this, and was, in some degree, aware of the unreasonableness of precipitancy. She thought it might be better to wait and see; and yet anxiety, eagerness, affection, urged her to do something, or try something, at least, for her uncle, as soon as possible. She could not rest under the load; she felt as if inactivity would be almost a crime; and though she could see no light whichever way she turned, yet she resolved to attempt something, not feeling very sure whether she should do injury or not.

Such was the course of her meditation, for nearly half an hour, after Ned Hayward left her; and yet it must be confessed that, though these meditations were upon painful subjects, they were not altogether painful. Did you ever listen attentively, dear reader, to one of those fine and masterly pieces of Beethoven's music, where the great composer seems to take a delight in puzzling and perplexing the

hearer, drowning him, as it were, under a flood of harmony, where discords are as frequently introduced as anything else? But still, through them all runs a strain of melody, which links them all together.

Such was very much the case of Mary Clifford. For, although the general train of her thoughts was sombre, and there was much cause for sadness in all she had heard, there was something very sweet—she herself knew not what—that mingled with the old current of reflection, and harmonized it beautifully. It was something hopeful, expectant, trustful—a belief that by the agency of some one all would go right. Was it love? Was it the first dawn of that which, to the young mind, is like the dawn of the morning, that softens and beautifies everything? I cannot tell; but, at all events, it was so far undeveloped, that, like the strain of melody which pours through the whole of a fine composition, giving a tone of richness and sweetness to every part, it was undistinguishable from the rest, felt and known to be there as a thing separate and alone, and yet inseparable.

Whenever she tried to distinguish it, fear seized upon her, and she flew away again.

Why was she happy, when all that she had heard was the most likely to render her otherwise? She did not know, she would not know; but still she gave way to the feeling, although she would not give way to the thought; and while she shrank from clothing her own sensations in distinctness, longed to render them distinct, that she might enjoy them more fully.

"I will go and seek Isabella," she said, at length; "she must know of this; and then we can all consult together, perhaps, if one can but teach her light gay heart to be prudent and discreet—and yet," she continued, thoughtfully, "she has, perhaps, more worldly wisdom than myself, more knowledge of life and all life's things. Those who are accustomed to commune much with their own thoughts, gain, I am afraid, a conceit in their own opinion, which makes them undervalue those which are formed upon a practical knowledge of the world. Isabella is full of resources, and, perhaps, may devise many means that would never strike me."

These thoughts passed through her mind as she was approaching the house, and very soon after she stood in her cousin's dressing-room, finding her, even at that early hour, up and partly dressed.

"Why, dearest Mary," exclaimed Isabella, "where have you got all those roses? The morning air must be very good for the health, as every one says, to change your cheek, which was yesterday as pale as twilight, into the very aspect of the dawn."

"I have been out walking on the terrace, more than an hour," replied Mary, "and I was pale yesterday, I suppose, from the fright of the night before. I have had a companion, too, Isabella," she continued, gaily, though her voice trembled a little; "Captain Hayward came up and joined me, and told me all his adventures of the night before."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Miss Slingsby. "His adventures must be very wild and singular, I suppose; for his is just the spirit to seek them and to make the most of them when he has got them. But what has happened since, Mary? —We had all the details, you know, up to the period at which, like Don Quixote, he arrived at an inn."

"I do not think there is anything in the least like Don Quixote about him, Isabella," replied Mary Clifford, gravely; "if he seeks adventures, it is for the advantage of others."

“So did Don Quixote,” replied her cousin, giving her a sly smile; “but what did he say, dear cousin?”

“Oh, there was a great deal besides what you heard last night,” replied Miss Clifford; “you only had the sketch—the picture is still to be filled up, and he had better do it for himself. However, I have other things to talk to you about, Isabella, of more importance; and she glanced at the maid that was arranging her mistress’s hair.

“I shall be ready in a minute,” answered Miss Slingsby. “Make haste, Minette; I think you have been longer than usual this morning.”

The maid, however, had a thousand reasons to give for being longer, all perfectly valid in her own estimation; and, whether out of spite, or in the hope that the two young ladies would grow tired of waiting, and say plainly all they had to say, I cannot tell, but she contrived to occupy a full quarter of an hour more in dressing her mistress’s hair. Those who calculate upon the difficulty of carrying a secret are rarely mistaken; but in this case Mademoiselle Minette did not arrive at her end. Mary said

nothing more; and, at length, the girl was dismissed, and the two cousins were left alone together.

“In the name of fortune!” exclaimed Miss Slingsby, as soon as the maid was gone, “what solemn thing have you got to tell? Has he proposed already? On my word, it is a very speedy declaration!”

Mary coloured like a rose, but answered, gravely, “Dear Isabella, how can you be so light? If you speak of Captain Hayward, our conversation has been upon very different subjects, and was a very serious one. I am afraid I shall have to distress you, Isabella, as much or more than his information distressed me.”

“I hope not,” replied Isabella. “I did not know at all that he was a distressing person. I always thought him a very pleasant fellow, and imagined you thought so, too, dear cousin; but how has he contrived to distress you?”

“Why, by some news, of no very pleasant character,” answered Mary Clifford. “He overheard, accidentally it seems, some conversation relating to your father, from which he learned some particulars that grieve me greatly to hear.”

“Indeed!” cried Miss Slingsby, with a

start; "they are not going to shoot at him, I hope?"

"Oh, dear, no," replied Mary; "nothing of that kind; but about his affairs generally."

"Well, speak out boldly, Mary dear," answered her cousin; "I see you are going round the matter for fear of vexing me; tell it at once, whatever it may be. You know I have a bold heart, not easily put down; and, though you judge me light and thoughtless, I know, believe me, Mary, it is more a necessity of my situation than anything else. If I were to think by the hour together over all the things that are unpleasant to me, as you or my dear aunt would do, I should only kill myself without altering them. Papa has his own ways, which were formed before I was born; and, coming so late in the day, I don't think I have any right to meddle with them. I get out of the way of all that is disagreeable to me as much as I can; and, when I can't, like a good, dutiful daughter, I submit. You know that he is, to use our good old gardener's expression, 'as kind as the flowers in May;' and I should be very ungrateful if I teased him by constantly opposing habits which I cannot change, and which are my elder brothers and sisters. My philosophy

may be a bad one; but pray leave it to me, Mary, for I could not be happy with any other."

Mary Clifford took her cousin's hand and pressed it kindly in her own. "I would not take it from you for the world," she said, "for I know and understand all you feel, and am quite well aware that you are performing the first of duties in endeavouring to make your father's house as happy for him as you can, while you don't suffer your own mind and manners to be tainted by customs you do not approve. You have had a hard part to play, dear cousin, and you have played it well; but it is not upon these subjects I come to speak to you, but upon one which, though perhaps of less vital importance, unfortunately affects the happiness of this life more: your father's means and fortune, which, I am sorry to say, from all I hear, are very much embarrassed."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Isabella, gazing anxiously in her face; and Mary went on, as delicately as she could, to tell her all that Ned Hayward had communicated. At first, the poor girl seemed overwhelmed, exclaiming, "Ten days before they call for such a large sum! Six weeks before the whole is

finally gone from us! Good Heavens! Mary, what is to be done?"

In a moment, however, she rallied. "Well," she exclaimed, "I have been very blind—as blind as a great politician, Mary. A thousand things should have prepared me for this, that I now recollect—letters, and messages, and intimations of various kinds. That sleek knave, Wharton, is at the bottom of it all; but he shall not crush me; and I dare say we shall do very well with what is left. I have jewels and trinkets of my own and poor mamma's, to keep house for a long time; and there must be something left out of the wreck."

"But the thing is, if possible, to prevent the ship from being wrecked at all," answered Mary Clifford; and she then went on to tell all that Captain Hayward proposed to do, in order to prevent any immediate catastrophe—not trusting her voice to comment upon his conduct for a moment.

But Isabella did it for her—"Oh, dear, kind, generous fellow!" she cried, "how I love him! Don't you, Mary? Although papa may have many bad and foolish friends, you see there are some noble and wise ones—but I'll tell you what, Mary, we'll go down and talk to him,

after breakfast, and we'll all consult and see what is to be done; we'll have a plot to serve papa, whether he will or not; and I declare Mr. Beauchamp shall be one of the conspirators."

"Just what I would propose," answered Mary Clifford; "for, although you have known Mr. Beauchamp but a very short time——"

"A good deal longer than you have known Ned Hayward," answered Miss Slingsby, with a smile.

"Nay, nay—pray do be serious, Isabella," answered her cousin; "I was going to say, though we have known Mr. Beauchamp but a very short time, I do believe—from various traits I have seen—I do think he is an amiable and kind-hearted man, though perhaps somewhat cold and stately."

"Oh, he may be warm enough, for aught we know," replied Miss Slingsby—"but there is the breakfast bell; papa will be down, and want his coffee."

CHAPTER VI.

NOBODY could perceive at the breakfast-table that Sir John Slingsby had suffered from the strong emotions by which we have seen him influenced on the preceding night. No one could have conceived that his state and fortune were in the tottering condition which Ned Hayward had represented. He was as gay, as happy, as full of jest and merriment as a school-boy of seventeen. And as his sister was peculiarly cheerful, it seemed to excite in him even a more merry and jocund liveliness. To say the truth, Mrs. Clifford felt that her bond was broken; that her visit to her brother's house, and her stay with him, had unlinked one of the chains of cold and formal proprieties which had

been wound round her for so many years. Heaven knows, she never wished to see, hear, or do, think, or countenance anything that was evil! but yet her heart felt freer and lighter—it had more room to expand. In fact, the sunshine of early days seemed to be reflected upon it, and it opened out to the light like a flower. She was gayer than her daughter, though silent and still, except when called into conversation by some lively sally; but she smiled, was good-humoured, and answered even merrily, when a jest passed round, and seemed to wonder at the more than wonted gravity of her Mary. Isabella was almost too gay; as gay as the habits of the world and her own sense of propriety permitted; but, to an observing eye this cheerfulness was rather assumed than real; and to any one who, like Mary, had the secret of her heart, it was very evidently affected to cover a deeper and a graver current beneath.

“Well, what’s the news this morning?” said Sir John, as Isabella poured out the tea and coffee; “a quarter to nine and no tidings stirring? This seems to promise a dull day. Nobody’s mill been burnt down? Nobody’s cat killed? Nobody’s wife eloped? Nobody’s daughter gone to Gretna-green? Nobody’s

house been broken open, game stolen, hen-roosts been plundered, pocket been picked, or nose been pulled?—Faith, we shall never get through the four-and-twenty hours without something to enliven us. All the objects of country life are gone. It seems to me that the world has turned as dead as a horse-pond, and men and women nothing but the weed at the top, waiting coolly in green indifference for the ducks to come and gobble them up. Lack-a-day! lack-a-day! if we had but Ned Hayward here to cheer us up! What can have become of him?”

“Oh, he has come back, my dear uncle,” replied Mary; “I saw him on the terrace as I was taking my morning’s walk.”

“Then, why is he not here?” exclaimed Sir John Slingsby, “why is he absent from his post? What business has he at Tarningham-park, unless it be like a ray of the summer sunshine to make everything gay around him.”

“He told me that he was going down to catch a trout,” replied Miss Clifford; “he has some bet with you, my dear uncle, it seems?”

“The boy is mad!—irretrievably gone! Bedlam or Saint Luke’s, or some of those places they call a *private asylum*, is the only

place for him now," exclaimed Sir John Slingsby. "What, gone down to catch a trout! without pausing to take either rest or breakfast, with his hands burnt, and a shot in his arm—so that fellow Gimlet said, they tell me."

"He seemed very well," answered Miss Clifford; "and he said he had his breakfast before he left the inn."

"I don't believe a word of it," answered her uncle; "that's just one of his old tricks, Mary; if there was anything to be done, he used never to mind breakfast, or dinner, or supper, or anything else; the matter was always done first, and then he did not mind a good dinner, and a bottle of claret, or even two, as the case might be. I never saw such a fellow! We used to call him, 'thoughtless Ned Hayward;' but the fact is, he used to think more in five minutes than the rest of us altogether in four-and-twenty hours, and then he was free for the whole day—but here come the letters and papers; we shall have some news now, and we shall have something to laugh at, with, or because of."

Thus saying, Sir John took the bag which was brought to him by the butler, opened it

with a key attached to his watch-chain, and drew forth the articles it contained one by one. First came a newspaper in its cover—it was, I suppose, the *Times*, by its bulk—then another and another. All these were laid down beside him; and next came the small packet of letters, and then, oh! how eager all were to devour the contents. Strange and mysterious mixture of old rags and size, what a world of emotions have you conveyed about this earth! Not the most terrible stage that has ever represented to the eyes of admiring thousands the works of the poet, or displayed the skill of the actor, has produced such deep tragedy as you. How often has the sight of the thin folded sheet, with its strange, crooked, black hieroglyphics, overwhelmed the lightest and the gayest heart with heaviness and mourning!—how often changed the smile into the tear!—how often swept away the gay pageants of imagination, and memory and hope, and left the past all darkness, and the future all despair! But, on the contrary, how often have ye been the unexpected messengers of happiness and joy!—how often have ye brought sunshine and light into the benighted breast!—how often dispelled, in a moment, the dark thunder-clouds of the

world's blackest storms!—ay, and sometimes, too, have closed, as with a lightning-flash, the black, tempestuous day of a long sorrowful life, with a gleam of ecstasy, too intense and potent to survive!

All eyes turned eagerly to Sir John Slingsby, while he looked over the letters. The first was in a stiff and clerk-like hand, which he put down beside him with a low chuckle, which probably indicated an intention of not reading it at all. The next displayed a scrawl, written as if with a butcher's skewer, thin, straggling, and irregular, like the scratching of a hen in the last agony. That met the fate of the former one. Then came an address in a good bold, dashing hand, with a name written in the corner.

“Ah, ah!” cried he, “from Tom South, about the borough of Twistandskin. Before I stand, I’ll see him.—Lord bless me! what was I going to say?” and putting his hand to his mouth, he looked to his sister with a low laugh; but that letter was put at a little distance from the two others. “Ah! Mr. Beauchamp, here is one for you,” continued the baronet; “sent up with the postmaster’s compliments!—d—n his compliments! who wants his compliments?”

and he gave the letter over to Beauchamp, who was sitting at the opposite side of the table, next his daughter. "My dear Harriet, do try that pasty—it is excellent; or take something, in the name of Heliogabalus! This is not a fast-day, is it? There's the best ham that ever came out of Yorkshire, on the side-board. There, Isabella, there's an epistle for you, from one of your sweet, maudlin, blonde and satin friends in London, as soft and insipid as a glass of orgeat, I'll answer for it; full of loves, and dears, and sweet friends, and languishing for your darling society, and wondering what you can be doing in the country, spending your beauty on the desert air. Don't let me hear a word of it; I hate them all; and, if I had my will, would smother them all to death under eider-down quilts. Pray read your letter, Mr. Beauchamp. Everybody in this world is anxious to read their letters but me; and as yours may very likely require an answer, you had better look at it at once; for one post here goes out at eleven."

Now, Sir John Slingsby, in the latter part of his speech, showed himself considerate; for Mr. Beauchamp, during the first part of breakfast, had borne a very grave and business-like

air. He had given himself up, it is true, to a more cheerful spirit on the day before; he had been calmly cheerful at dinner,—gay in the evening, especially when he was near Miss Slingsby. But who is not gay in the evening hours, when the whole nervous fluid seems to have accumulated about the brain and the heart,—when the anticipated, or actual labours of the day are over, the apportioned task of care and anxiety are done? The load of the four-and-twenty hours is thrown off, and we snatch at the brief portion that remains between labour and repose, for enjoyment. Who is not gay, when beauty and cheerfulness pour their mingled rays upon us, flooding our feelings and our thoughts with a bright, happy, and congenial stream? Take a glass of iced-water, dear reader—as cold as you will, so that it be not actually frozen—and pour into it a merry glass of warm champagne; see how it will sparkle and dance up to the brim; and, unless the heart of man is a mass of ice indeed, such will be the effect upon it of mere association with youth, beauty, and innocent gaiety.

But since then, Beauchamp had slept upon the matter. The night before, he had gone on with the current; and now time had been

afforded him to ask himself how far that current had carried him. He was doubtful whether he had not been borne too far; there were doubts, hesitations, apprehensions in his mind; and he was grave—very grave indeed. He had wished Miss Slingsby good morning, he had expressed a hope she had rested well, he had been most gracefully courteous—too courteous; for very polished surfaces are generally cold; and Isabella, who had come down with the intention of speaking to him frankly and freely upon matters that interested her deeply, had shrunk into herself more than was her wont.

Beauchamp opened the letter, however, with rather a languid and unexpectant air, but the first words seemed to rivet his attention. The eye of Isabella, without her will, or rather against it, fixed upon him. She saw his cheek turn pale, then glow again warmly, and then a glad and well-satisfied smile curled his lip. He ended the letter, and, looking towards the ceiling, his lips moved for an instant; and, folding up the paper, he put it in his pocket, giving way for a few seconds to thought, which did not seem unsatisfactory.

Isabella Slingsby was the most straight-

forward girl in the world, by nature; and she had but one class of experimental teaching in regard to concealing her feelings. She could hide, occasionally, how much she disliked some of her father's guests; she could conceal from him how painful to her was much that she saw under his own roof. In everything else, however, she was as frank as the day; and, seeing Mr. Beauchamp receive a letter, and look not discontented with it, she said, somewhat inconsiderately:

"You seem to have had pleasant intelligence, Mr. Beauchamp?"

That gentleman turned his eyes suddenly upon her, and very fine and lustrous eyes they were, and he gazed at her for an instant with a smile so blended with many emotions, that Isabella, she knew not why, cast down her eyes, and coloured. After a brief pause, he replied:

"Not unpleasant, Miss Slingsby; for so strange a thing is the heart of man, or, rather I should say, so strange a thing is his fate, that, in the course of years and the change of circumstances, there will be pleasure even in the total ending of what we once believed might be happiness."

“That is because men are so fickle, I suppose,” answered Isabella. “The only constant beings on earth are women and Newfoundland dogs, Mr. Beauchamp—it is so, I assure you, whatever you may think of it. I know the wicked world takes a different view of the subject; but the world is man’s; and women might very well say, a different picture would be produced, ‘if we lions were painters!’”

“Nay,” answered Beauchamp, laughing, “I am not one of those evil speakers and slanderers. I have had time to observe, in a world where I have been these many years as a mere spectator, watching the characters of men and women; and I can justly say, that there are, at least, ten good women for one good man. Circumstances may have something to do with it; education, opportunity for good or evil; but still there must be a fine and pure spirit at the heart, teaching to avoid wrong and to seek right.”

“I believe, in truth, there is,” answered Mrs. Clifford, joining in the conversation; “and that the bent of almost every woman’s mind is towards that which is good. But if you are the creatures of circumstances, Mr. Beauchamp, we are, in many respects, the creatures of your

hands; you give the bent and the direction of somewhat more than half our thoughts, I am afraid, and are——”

“To be blamed, if you go wrong,” exclaimed Sir John Slingsby, with a loud laugh; “to be sure, to be sure; that is a woman’s philosophy, my dear Harriet; all that she does good is her own—all that she does wrong is man’s; but let me tell you, my dear sister, that there is no little doubt, in the minds of the best informed, which has the most influence; man over woman, or woman over man. I am of the last opinion; and I see it every day in my case and that of others. Here this girl, Isabella, rules me with a rod of iron—does anything she likes with me; but, by my faith, for this day I shall abstract myself from her authority; for I have some business to settle during the morning; and she must entertain her guests as she can. Mr. Beauchamp, if you leave my house during the next four-and-twenty hours, it will be a clear proof that Miss Slingsby does not entertain you properly; and I shall be very angry with her inhospitality, if I do not find you at lunch and dinner, tea and supper, and breakfast to-morrow morning; for I shall be quite sure she has not made my house agreeable.”

“An imputation that I should be the last to bring upon Miss Slingsby,” said Mr. Beauchamp; and in truth he seemed to feel what he said; for when they rose from the breakfast-table, and the party sauntered to the window, in that pleasant indolence which generally succeeds the first meal of the day—that five minutes which succeeds to breakfast—in short, before we put on the armour of active exertion—he attached himself closely to Miss Slingsby’s side, and engaged her in conversation so light and cheerful, that the whole character of the man seemed changed. Not that what he said was without thought; for there was a deep under-current of reflection running all the time, which gave it quite a different tone from what is called small-talk. It was sparkling, brilliant, even playful; but its principal effects on the minds of those who heard was to set them thinking. There was a marked attention in his manner towards Isabella Slingsby, which flattered her a little. She might have perceived before that he was struck with her beauty, that he admired her, that he liked her society, when he had met her at Dr. Miles’s. She had thought him exceedingly agreeable, and had fancied that he thought her so, too;

but there had been nothing said or done—not one word, one look, one gesture, that could set imagination flying any further; and she had rested satisfied with letting things take their course, without any other feeling than a slight degree of regret that her father had not made the acquaintance of one so superior in manners and in mind to the generality of those around. During the preceding evening, Beauchamp had appeared in no other character than that of the calm, dignified, quiet, and well-informed gentleman. But after breakfast his attentions were more pointed; and Isabella felt a little agitated, and doubtful of what all this would come to. She was not fond of anything that agitated her; and, therefore, somewhat more abruptly than was necessary, she broke through the conversation which was going on, saying:

“Mr. Beauchamp, Mary and I have entered into a compact to go down and see Captain Hayward win his bet.”

“What bet?” asked Beauchamp, who had forgotten all about it.

“To catch the largest trout in the river before twelve o’clock,” replied Isabella; “will you escort us? My dear aunt, won’t you come, too?”

"No, my dear," answered Mrs. Clifford; "I have letters to write, too, like your father."

"I have no letters to write," exclaimed Sir John Slingsby, somewhat petulantly; "I wish I had nothing less pleasant to do; but I have to see the steward and a lawyer about business—the greatest bores on earth. I wish to Heaven Peter the Great had been but autocrat of England for a bare month. Heaven and earth! how he would have thinned the roll of attorneys!—or if we could but bring them under the cutting and maiming act, what hanging and transporting we should have. I am sure they cut up our time and our comforts, maim our property, and cripple our resources. But the devil never abandons his own; and so they slip out of every noose that is made to catch them. There's that fellow, Stephen Gimlet, can make, they say, springes that will catch woodcocks and snipes, hares, pheasants, partridges, ruffs, and rees; hang me, if I don't ask him if he has not got any trap that will strangle an attorney."

"If he fails, ask Ned Hayward," said Isabella, half jokingly, half earnestly; "I have no doubt he would furnish you with what you want."

"Perhaps he would, perhaps he would," an-

swered Sir John ; “ not a bad thought, Bella ; but hang it, I must go and see the steward before that fellow Wharton comes. So good bye, good bye, for the present. Mind the luncheon time ; and if Ned loses and does not bring me home a trout of at least three pounds, we’ll drink his health in a bottle of the old Hermitage—get your shawls and bonnets, get your shawls and bonnets ; and now, Harriet, if you want to send over to your place, be quick with your letters, for I have got a man going to Tarningham at twelve.”

Mrs. Clifford left the room with her brother, and was followed immediately by her daughter and niece. Beauchamp walked out into the hall, and got his hat, gave some directions to one of the servants in regard to sending up some of his clothes from the inn at Tarningham, when anybody was dispatched to the town ; and then returned to the window of the breakfast-room. There he paused and looked out, revolving various things in his mind, and coming to the half-muttered conclusion, at length : “ It must be so. It is quite clear—it is certain.” But when any one determines that a thing is quite clear, is certain, before we agree with him in opinion, we should know

what other trains of thought are going on in his mind at the moment, jostling this idea and that out of their right places, leaving others far behind, and stimulating others again to run at lightning speed, who knows whither, to win their race. It is not at all impossible, that if you or I, dear reader, could see into Mr. Beauchamp's mind at this moment, we might come to a very different conclusion on the premises, and think that the proposition was anything but *quite* clear, the result not at all *certain*.

However that might be, there he stood with his hat in his hand, in very good spirits, when Miss Slingsby and her cousin appeared.

Isabella was rather fluttered, as we have said, about something or another; she felt a timidity that was not usual with her, and she got her cousin between herself and Mr. Beauchamp before they reached the door, as if she intended that he should offer Mary Clifford his arm. Beauchamp manœuvred so skilfully, however, that before they were through the door and down the steps, he was by Isabella's side again, and, as she had two sides, one of which was certain to be unprotected, while that side was almost certain to be the point of attack to a dextrous enemy, she gave up

the battle at once, and let things take their course.

The walk, as Isabella managed it, was an exceedingly pleasant one. In the first place, there were the beauties of nature. To what heart, under what circumstances, do the beauties of nature fail to bring sweet feelings? There is something in the universe, of which we have no definite conception; perhaps, it is too wide, too vast, to submit itself to anything like demonstration. We all feel it, we all know it, we all enjoy it. The ancients and some of the moderns have deified it and called it Pan. It is, in fact, the universal adaptation of one thing to another: the harmony of all God's works; the infinite music of an infinite variety. It is best figured in music—yet faintly figured; for music gives only the image of the whole by a part. The sequence of bright things is the melody of creation; their synchronous existence, the harmony of God's Almighty will. But in this, as in all else, woe be unto those who have worshipped the creature for the Creator, and who have mistaken this grand harmony in the infinity of the created things, for the God who willed the harmony as well as the separate tones. It is but one of the ex-

pressions of Almighty love, and those expressions are as infinite as the love from which they emanate. Our finite, our contracted, our exceedingly minute view of all things, constantly keeps us down from the contemplation and the conception of the immeasurable to that which is within the ken of our own microscopic vision. If creation itself is infinite, the infinite harmony thereof is but a part of creation, and is in itself a proof of that intelligent Providence, which man denies, because he does not see.

The walk was an exceedingly pleasant one, coming in varied scenes upon the mind, each contrasted with the other, yet each harmonizing beautifully. After about a hundred and fifty, or two hundred yards of short turf, they entered a glade, where tall trees, backed by deep shrubs, cut off the sunbeams, except where here and there they struggled through an open spot. Tall beeches, more than a century old, crossed their arms above, to give shade to the ground below; and though the walk, nearly fifty feet in breadth from bole to bole of the old trees, was mown along its whole extent, yet a little to one side and the other the wild flowers appeared gemming the earth like stars upon a firmament of green. There was

the purple columbine and the blue periwinkle, and the yellow primrose, and the pale bending anemone; the hyacinth and the violet; and if art had had any share therein, the arrangement of the flowers was so skilfully managed, that all seemed owing but to nature's hand. The deep branches of the beech, and the green shade which they cast through the air, gave a solemn and elevating tone to the whole. The flowers and the occasional bursts of sunshine, the rich colours of the moss, yellow and brown, and green, enlivened the scene, and made the solemn stillness of the long avenue seem like a thoughtful countenance brightened by a smile. Then suddenly, when they had walked on for about a quarter of a mile, they turned to the left through a wide break in the alley, and all was wonderfully changed. Shade and melancholy were gone; and they stood upon the edge of a round sloping descent of some three or four hundred feet, covered with green short turf, and marked out, at short distances, by clumps of birches and hawthorns. On the right was the woody crest of the hill, concealing in its bosom the continuation of the avenue, which they had just quitted; but on the left, wide over the tree tops, and waving ground be-

yond, stretched out an extensive prospect in the sunshine, all light and loveliness. It was one of the bright days of early summer. Scarcely a cloud was in the sky, and yet there was a softening effect in the atmosphere, which mellowed the lights and shades into each other, and suffered the sight to pass softly and gently from each line of the distance to that which succeeded, with a sort of dreamy pleasure, vague and indefinite, but very sweet, like the sounds that sometimes come upon our sleeping ears in the visions of the morning.

Skirting along the hill with a gradual descent, the broad gravel-walk plunged into the valley, and there all was altered once more. A wide and uncultivated wood swept round, a small sparkling rivulet dashed on towards the broader stream amidst bushes and shrubs and water-plants; a willow here and there bent down its long pliant branches over the glittering stream, and a patch of tall bulrushes raised their long green stems, where any occasional interruption forced the water to spread out. The trees were far apart, though the ground was broken and uneven, and the flapping wing of a heron, with his gray shadowy form rising up at some fifty or sixty yards' distance, added to the saddening

and sombring effect. It was like a discord in a fine piece of music: just protracted long enough to make what had gone before and what followed after more delightful, and the next minute they issued forth upon the warm green meadows, gilded with buttercups, that lay by the side of the wider river.

Heaven only knows what Isabella meant in bringing Beauchamp by that path, if she did not intend him to make love to her. She could have taken him round by the other side of the house, and the straight horse-road to the bridge; or down over the turf through the open parts of the park, amongst the deer and fern, to the farther end of the river, where it issued out of the grounds. But, no; whether from something that was going on in her own bosom, which made her instinctively choose the scenes which most assimilated with her feelings, or from accident, caprice, or design, she led him through a path, full of the sense of love. There was one too many for a declaration, it is true; and she knew she was so far guarded; but yet it was a very dangerous walk for any two people, whose hearts had no better security than the simple presence of

another, to stray along, upon such a day as that.

The letter which Beauchamp had received at breakfast had evidently either pleased, or entertained, or relieved him; but the effect was, that he was infinitely gayer when he set out, than he had ever been since we have first met with him. He crossed the open ground by Isabella's side with a firmer and more elastic step, with his head high, and his shoulders back. He gazed over the wide-spread park scenery around, and seemed to snuff the air like a horse about to start upon a race. He commented upon the loveliness of such views, remarked how very English they were—how very seldom one ever saw anything similar in any other land—and seemed to enjoy the whole so highly, as to leave an impression that the pleasure of the walk was heightened by the society in which it was taken. When he came under the shade of the tall trees, his tone was somewhat changed; it became softer, more serious, more earnest; and so he went on, his thoughts seeming to receive a colouring from the scenery through which he passed, without losing their general character, or particular train at

the moment. It was evident through all that he was thinking of Isabella Slingsby; and though, with finished courtesy, he divided his conversation very equally—not quite—between her and her cousin, yet even when he was speaking to Mary Clifford, it was very evident that his words, or at all events, his thoughts, were addressed to Isabella.

Mary said little, except just to keep up the conversation, and deprive it of anything like awkwardness; but she felt, and indeed nobody could help feeling, that Mr. Beauchamp's manner towards her cousin was too marked and particular to be mistaken. Isabella, on her part, gave way to all the gaiety of her heart, sometimes with bright and laughing sallies playing round Beauchamp's more earnest and deep-toned thoughts, sometimes yielding to the impulse which he imparted, and venturing into the deep waters of feeling and reflection, whither he led her, till startled at herself, she took fright and retreated. She was very happy, too; secure in Mary's presence from anything that might agitate or alarm, she felt that she could give way to the pleasure of the moment; and even the knowledge of her father's situation, and of the dangers and difficulties

that beset him, acted but as a softening and subduing power, which brought down her spirits from their habitual gaiety, and rendered her heart more susceptible of tenderer and deeper impressions.

Beauchamp felt that he was listened to, that he pleased, that he might be beloved. He had seen nothing coquettish about Isabella; he had heard a high character of her; he had been told by one, who had known her from childhood, that she seemed lighter than she really was; that if there was anything assumed, it was the gaiety; that all the more profound things, which occasionally appeared in her character, might be trusted and relied upon; and that the seemingly high spirits were but as the breeze, which ruffles the tree-tops without touching the depth of the forest. He felt sure, therefore, that she would not sport with him, if she believed he was in earnest, and he took care, that upon that subject she should have little doubt.

Thus passed away their walk; and though Mary Clifford would have given a great deal, had she dared to venture, to make Mr. Beauchamp a sharer in the secret of Sir John Slingsby's affairs, and ask the advice and

assistance of one who had evidently gained much experience of the world, without being spoiled by the world, yet she knew not how to begin. A feeling of timidity came over her that stopped her; and the course of the conversation—its sparkling rapidity at some times, its deep and intense feeling at others—gave no opportunity of introducing a subject entirely discordant, without forcing it in a manner both harsh and discourteous. She determined, therefore, as they approached the river, to leave the matter to Captain Hayward, whose frank straightforwardness, she thought, would soon either find or make an opportunity.

When they reached the bank, however, Captain Hayward was not to be seen; but Isabella pointed to an elbow of the wood, which concealed a turn in the stream, saying that he was most likely higher up, and accordingly they walked on. As they were passing through the little path which cut through an angle of the woodland, they heard suddenly a loud exclamation, then a very ungentlemanly oath, and the next moment, as they issued forth, they saw Ned Hayward grappling with a tall, powerful man, in what may be called a semi-military dress. The two were, apparently,

well matched, though few, either in strength, activity or skill, could match our friend. But the stranger, whoever he was, practised a trick, which he thought likely to free himself from his adversary, even at the risk of his own life. He struggled hard, and in the struggle drew towards the brink. Ned Hayward made a violent effort to resist the impulse, and most likely would have been successful, for, if anything, he was the stronger man of the two. But a part of the green turf gave way, undermined by the course of the current, and both plunged in together into a deep pool, and disappeared for an instant in the water.

CHAPTER VII.

A MAP is a very useful thing: I wonder what people did without it before it was invented. Yet there were great travellers in those days, too, both by land and water. Adam began the first mode of travelling, and Noah the second, and they managed very well without either chart or compass, so that it is evident those instruments are nothing but luxuries, and ought to be done away with. Nevertheless, I feel that I should be much better off, and so would the reader, too, if I could give here, on this page, a map of the county of —, just to show him the relative position of the place called Buxton's Inn and the little village of Coldington-cum-Snowblast, which lay nearly north-

west of Buxton's Inn, and at the distance, by the road, of about six miles. The innkeepers charged seven miles' posting, because it was the seventeenth part of a furlong beyond the six miles. However, a dreary little village it was, situated on one of the two roads from Tarningham to London, which was, indeed, somewhat shorter than the other, but so hilly, so tiresome, so bleak, and so stiff, as the post-boys termed it, that man and beast alike preferred the other road, and generally went to and from Tarningham by Buxton's Inn. Nevertheless, it was absolutely necessary that a pair or two of posters should be kept at Coldington, as that was the only direct road to several considerable towns; and though it was but an eight-mile stage, yet the cattle, when they had got over the hills, had no inclination to go further. The post-horses had engendered a public-house, which was designated by courtesy an inn, but it was a very solitary one, with very few visitors but those who took a glass of beer or spirits at the bar, and a chance mercantile traveller, who came to supply the two shops which ornamented the village, and slept there for the night.

At a very early hour of the morning, however,

on the day of which we have just been speaking, a post-chaise drew up to the door with horses from Buxton's Inn; and a fresh relay was immediately ordered to carry the travellers on towards Bristol. A tall, powerful, showily-dressed man got out, with a lady closely veiled, whose costume spoke of Parisian manufacture; and while the portmanteaux and other articles of baggage were being taken into the doorway, to rest in peace till they could be placed upon the new chaise, the gentleman paid the post-boy, and then asked if he was going back directly.

"In about an hour, sir," replied the man, touching his hat, with the air of one well satisfied with his fee.

But at this reply the traveller looked blank, and said, "Well, it does not matter. I must get some lad to run over across the moor with this note to Mr. Wittingham. Just see for some one, my good fellow. He shall have half-a-crown for his pains."

But the post-boy was not such a goose as to let the half-crown slip by him, and, with the most respectful air in the world, he assured the gentleman that he was quite ready to go that minute, and that he had only proposed to stay

an hour because he did not know—how should he?—that the other wanted to send back.

The note and the half-crown were immediately given, the post-boy got into his saddle again, resisted the soft entreaties of the ostler to take a glass of something, and trotted away. No sooner was he gone, however, in the full persuasion that ere a quarter of an hour was over his two travellers would be on their way to Bristol, than the gentleman he left behind seemed to have suddenly changed his mind. The horses were countermanded, a room upstairs looked at, some breakfast ordered, and there he and his fair companion seemed disposed to pass the day. After a short but hearty breakfast, which was crowned by a glass of brandy, upon the strength of such an early drive, the gentleman himself sallied forth, saying to the lady, “I must see that fellow Stephen, and find out if he has peached. If he has, we had better get over the water for a while, at all events; though they can prove nothing, I am sure.”

“You will take your rash, wild ways, love,” answered the lady, in a languid tone; “and then you are sure to get into a scrape.” But the gentleman did not wait for the end of the

admonition, leaving the room and shutting the door behind him.

We will stay with the lady, however, and a very pretty woman she was, though, indeed, there had been a time when she was prettier. She was certainly not less than four or five-and-thirty, with good, small features, and a complexion which had once been exceedingly fine. It had become somewhat coarse now, however, and looked as if the process of deterioration had been assisted by a good deal of wine, or some other stimulant perhaps still more potent. Her eyes were fine dark eyes, but they had grown somewhat watery, and there was an occasional vacancy in them, a wandering uncertainty that bespoke either some intense pre-occupation with other subjects than those immediately in question, or some failure of the intellect, either from temporary or permanent causes. Her figure was tall and fine, and her dress very handsome in materials and make; but yet there was something about it too smart. There were too much lace and ribbon, too many bright and gaudy colours, too much flutter and contrast, to be perfectly ladylike. There was also a negligence in the way of putting it on—almost a slovenliness, if one may go that length,

which made things nearly new look old and dirty.

Her air and manner, too, were careless and languid; and as she sat herself down on one chair, then moved to another, and rested her feet upon a third, it seemed as if something was continually weighing upon her mind, which wanted vigour and solidity enough to make even an effort to cast it off.

It was not that she seemed to mope at being left alone by her male companion, or that she felt or cared for his absence very much, although she evidently deemed his plans and purposes imprudent and perilous. Far from it: she was as gay, or perhaps gayer, when he was gone than before; sang a little bit of an Italian song, took a small note-book out of her bag and wrote in it some lines, which seemed, by their regular length, to be verses; and then, getting up again, she opened a portmanteau, brought forth a book, and began to read. She had not continued long, however, when she seemed to become tired of that also, and putting back the book again, gave herself up to thought, during the course of which her face was chequered with slight smiles and slight frowns, neither of which had the most pleasant expression in the world

There was a listlessness in it all, indeed, a sort of careless indolence, which perhaps bespoke a disposition hackneyed and spoiled by the pleasures, if not the pains of life.

The maid who carried away the breakfast things informed the landlady that "the woman up stairs was a taking on it easy, a sitting with her feet on one of the best chears." And although the good dame did not think fit to object to this proceeding, she mentally commented on it thus: "Them quality-folks is always giving themselves airs; but if she spiles my new kivers, I'll take it out in the bill, anyhow."

After this state of things had continued for somewhat more than an hour and a half, the gentleman came back, apparently in great haste, dripping like a Newfoundland dog, and, calling to the ostler before he ran up stairs, directed him to put-to the horses as soon as possible. Then, running up, he entered the room where he had left the lady, exclaiming,

"Quick, Charlotte; we must be off like the devil!"

"Why, what's the matter, Moreton?" she said, without moving an inch. "You are all

dripping wet; you have met with some adventure."

"And something else, too," answered the gentleman. "I have met with that devil of a fellow again, and he recognised me, and tried to stop me, but I pulled him into the river, and left him there, getting to the other bank Heaven knows how! All I am sure of is, that I kept his head under water for two or three minutes; for he fell undermost. But I have not time to talk more now, for we must go as if Satan drove us, and I will tell you more as we roll along."

"I hope he is drowned," said the lady, with the sweetest possible smile; "it is an easy death, they say. I think I shall drown myself one day or other."

"Pooh!" said the gentleman. "But come along, come along! I have something to tell you of Charles; so make haste."

"Of Charles!" exclaimed the lady, starting up as if suddenly roused from a sort of stupor, while a look of intense and fiery malignity came into her face. "What of him? Have you seen him? Did he see you?"

"I don't know," answered her companion.

“But come along;” and taking up one of the portmanteaux as the chaise drove up to the door, he hurried down, and sent up for the other. The lady followed with a quick step; for she now seemed to be all life and eagerness; and while the gentleman was paying the bill, she got into the chaise and beat the bottom of the vehicle with her small foot, as if impatient for his coming.

Before he could reach the carriage door, however, a man on horseback galloped quickly up, and, springing to the ground, caught the gentleman by the arm, exclaiming, “Why, hang it, Moreton, you have played me a scurvy trick, to go off and leave me before it was daylight.”

“I could not help it, my dear Wittingham,” replied the other: “I was obliged to be off; there is a d—d cousin of mine down here whom I would not have see me for the world. You must not stop me now, by Jove! for they have found out where I am, and I expect him to pay his respects very soon.”

“Devil take it! that’s unfortunate,” cried Wittingham; “I wanted you to go and call out that meddling scoundrel, Hayward, whom I told you of. He bolted into my room last

night, and we had a regular set-to. I told him he was a blackguard, and he told me he had horsewhipped me once, and would horsewhip me again whenever he met me, if I could not get some gentleman of honour to arrange a meeting with him."

"Upon my life, I can't stay," cried the other, "though I should like to see you shoot him, too, if he is alive, which I have some doubts of—but stay," he continued, after a moment's thought, "I will find a man for you, and I will send him down without loss of time—Major Woolstapler; he has been lately in foreign service, but that's all the same, and he's a capital hand at these things; and, if you follow his advice, you will shoot your man to a certainty—he shall be down before three days are over; I am off for Bristol, and so up the Bath road to London. We shall get there to-night; and he will be down to-morrow or the next day early. He'll hear of you at Buxton's, I suppose? Good-by, good-by." And he jumped into the chaise.

A moment after, as soon as the door was shut, he seemed to recollect something, and putting his head out of the window, he beckoned up young Wittingham, saying, in a low voice,

“ You’ll need the bull-dogs, so I’ll send you down mine. Tell Woolstapler to contrive that you have number one. It will do his business, if tolerably well handled—and I say, Wittingham, don’t mention to any one that you have seen me either here or at Oxford. My cousin fancies I am in India still.” Then turning to the postillion, he said, “ Go on, and brush along fast. Sixpence a mile for good going.”

Never was such an intimation given to a postillion without the horses suffering for it. I actually once made a Bavarian go seven miles and a half an hour between Ulm and Augsburg by the same process. I record it as amongst the memorable events of my life, proudly satisfied that no man upon earth ever did the same, either before or since. On the present occasion, the postillion, without fear, struck his spurs into the horse’s side, laid the whip over the back of the other with that peculiar kind of gentle application which intimated that if the brown-coated gentleman did not get on as hard as his four legs would carry him, the instrument of propulsion would fall more heavily the next time ; and away they went, at a pace which was a canter up hill, a trot down, and a gallop over the flat. Captain Moreton leaned

back in the chaise, and murmured, "We've cut them, by Jove!"

"But what is to be the end of all this?" asked the lady, who seemed to be now thoroughly roused: "if that man is to go on for ever having his own way, I do not see anything that is gained. We cannot keep this up much longer, Moreton; and so you thought two days ago. I shall be compelled to come forward and claim the arrears of the annuity by actual want of money. You told me, when we were at the inn there, that you had but ten pounds left, and now you seem to take a different view of the subject. You men are certainly the most vacillating creatures in the world."

"Nay," answered Moreton, bowing his head with an air of persiflage, "ladies, it must be owned, are superior to us in that, as in everything else. Two or three months ago you seemed enchanted with your plan, and declared, though it had not answered yet, it would answer in the end. I only thought it would not answer for want of means, otherwise I was as well disposed towards it as you could be. Now, on the contrary, you are eager to abandon it, while I wish to pursue it, for this simple reason—

that I have got the means of carrying it on for some time at least, and see the greatest probability of success. You must recollect, my dear Charlotte, that this is not a matter where a few hundreds or a few thousand pounds are at stake, but many thousands a-year."

As usually happens—for nobody ever hears or attends to more, at the utmost, than the twentieth part of what is said to them—the lady's mind fixed upon one particular sentence, without listening to anything more, and she repeated, as if contemplating and doubting, "You have got the means!—you have the means!"

"Ay, indeed, I have," answered Captain Moreton, with a smile. "I have got the means; for, while you were thinking I was doing nothing, I was shrewdly laying out my plans, by which I have contrived to screw full five hundred pounds out of that miserly rascal, Wharton. Was not that somewhat like a *coup*? With that we can live for some five or six months in Paris—economically, you know, my love—we must not have champagne and oysters every day; but we can do well enough; and before the time is out, the very event we wished to bring about will have happened;

otherwise my name is not Moreton. I can see very well how matters are going. He is caught: for the first time in his life, really and truly captivated; and, if we but take care to play our game well, he will be married and completely in our power within a few weeks. I know he will never be able to stand that; and there will but be one choice before him—either to buy you off at the highest possible price, or——”

“Buy me!” cried the lady; “if he had the diamond mines of Golconda, he could not buy me! If he could coin every drop of blood in his heart into a gold piece, I would see him mint them all to the very last, and then refuse them all with scorn and contempt. No, no—I will bring him to public shame and trial; I will make him a spectacle, have him condemned as a malefactor, break his proud spirit and his hard heart, and then leave him to his misery, as he has left me. For this I have toiled and longed; for this I have saved and scraped, like the veriest miser that ever worshipped Mammon in his lowest shape; for this I spared every sixpence, and lived in self-inflicted poverty and neglect, till I last met you, Moreton—seeking only to hoard enough to keep me till this revenge could be accomplished; and often, very often

since, I have been tempted to curse you for having, by the extravagance you taught and practised, squandered away the very means of obtaining all that I have longed and pined for."

"You speak in a very meek and Christian spirit," cried Captain Moreton, with a laugh; "but, nevertheless, I will not quarrel with it, Charlotte; for your revenge would serve my purposes, too. If we could but get him to commit himself beyond recall, I am his next heir, you know, my dear; and, therefore, the sooner he goes to heaven or Botany Bay, the better for me. Don't you think that we could contrive to get up a very well authenticated report of your death in some of the newspapers, with confirmations of all kinds, so as to leave no doubts in his mind?"

"Moreton, upon my life I believe you are a fool," cried the lady, bitterly; "would he not plead that as his excuse?—No, no; if I could so manage it, and Heaven or the devil send me wit, I care not which, to do it, I would contrive to make him fancy my death certain by small indications, such as none but himself could apply, and which, to the minds of others, would seem but frivolous pretexts if brought forward

in his own justification. If you can help me to such a plan, I will thank you; if not, we must trust to fortune."

"Good faith! I see no means to accomplish that," cried Moreton.

"Now, then, let us talk no more about it," answered the lady; and sinking back into the chaise, she relapsed into that state of seeming apathy from which nothing but passion had the power to rouse her.

"By the way," said Captain Moreton, after about a quarter of an hour's consideration, while the chaise rolled rapidly along, "all those things that you had in Paris—clocks and chimney-ornaments, and such things—what has become of them?"

"Oh, they are of little value, Moreton," said the lady; "a thousand francs would buy them all; the worth would not last you ten minutes at roulette."

"No," answered Captain Moreton, taking no notice whatever of the bitterness with which she spoke; "but I was thinking that they might be more serviceable at hazard."

"What do you mean?" she asked, abruptly, fixing her eyes upon him.

"I want to know where they are," answered Captain Moreton, in a cool tone.

"Why, you know very well," she answered, sharply, "when I left Paris, two years ago, with you, I told the girl, Jeanette, to take care of them till I came back. I dare say she has pawned or sold them long ago."

"That is the very thing," cried Moreton, rubbing his hands. "We will away to Paris with all speed; you will keep quite close; I will find out Ma'amselle Jeanette, and give her intimation that she may sell the things to pay her own arrears of wages; for that her poor dear lady will never come back to claim them."

"I see the plan," replied the lady, "but I fear it will not answer, Moreton; I had been living, as you know, in seclusion for a year before, and the very means that I took to make him think me dead, will now frustrate your scheme for that purpose."

"I don't know that, Charlotte," answered her companion. "He has been making inquiries in Paris, I know; you were traced thither distinctly, and whether all clue was there lost of your proceedings, neither I nor you can tell. But I'll tell you a story. When I was living

at my father's place, he had a particularly fine breed of pheasants, which regularly every year disappeared about the 8th or 9th of October, without the possibility of proving that any one had been into the copses. One day, however, when I was out early in the morning, I saw a fine old cock, with his green and gold neck, walking along straight through a field towards the ground of a neighbouring farmer. Every two or three seconds, down went the pheasant's head, and then on he walked again. I watched him for a few minutes over a hedge, then made my way through, put up the bird, and examined the spot where he had been. There I found a regular pheasant's footpath, and, nicely strewed along it, a line of barleycorns leading straight on to the farmer's ground, in the first hedge of which I discovered another portly bird fast by the neck in a springe. Now, my dear Charlotte, we'll strew some barleycorns, and perhaps we may catch your bird in the springe; I mean, we'll throw out such pieces of information as will lead to the certainty that you were in the Rue St. Jaques two years ago; we will get Jeanette to sell things to pay her own wages, with the best reason to believe you are dead; and if what I have heard is true, all

that you have so long aimed at will be accomplished before two months are over."

"I see—I see!" answered the lady, and the chaise stopped to change horses.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE quiet little town of Tarningham was more quiet than ever about the hour of twelve each day; for, according to good old primeval habits, noon was the period for feeding. Men ate, beasts ate, and birds ate, and we all know that eating is a silent process. It is the greatest mistake in the world for doctors to tell you to talk while you are eating, or else it is the bitterest sarcasm. They must either mean that your digestion should be spoiled, or else that you are in the habit of talking without thinking. But we will make a sort of corollary of it. "Man should not think while he is

eating, man should not talk without thinking ; *ergo*, man should not talk at his dinner." Therefore the people of Tarningham were wise ; for never was there such a silent set towards the hour of twelve o'clock, when they were eating. Doctor Miles could hear his own foot fall with the most perfect distinctness, as he walked along the High-street ; and a good broad foot it was, with a square-toed shoe and a buckle in it.

But Doctor Miles did not attend to the sound of his footfall ; he was, indeed, busily thinking of something else, with his eyes bent down—but not his head—he rarely bent his head—holding it upright and straight, and a little stiff, by the natural effect of mind on body. His meditations were very deep, so much so, that it required an extraordinary apparition to rouse him for his reverie. The sight, however, of a human being in the streets of Tarningham a little after twelve, was quite enough to produce that effect ; and at the distance of about two hundred yards from the door of the White Hart, he was startled by beholding the diminu-

tive form and somewhat contorted person of the poor little potboy, Billy Lamb, coming towards him with an empty jug in his hand. Nobody attended to Billy's meals. He got them how he could, where he could, and when he could. When all the rest were eating, he was sent with a jug of beer here, or a pint of gin there, and came back to feed upon the cold remnants of what the rest had eaten warm, if, indeed, they left him anything; but yet the fat landlord, ostlers, stable-boys, and barmaids, all thought that Billy was very well off. The landlord thought so, because he declared he had taken the boy in from charity; and the ostlers, and the postboys, and the barmaids believed it. O, charity! charity! thou perverted and misused term. Since the first words that were uttered by Adam in his garden, down to the moment when one of the world's great men declared that language was intended to conceal men's thoughts, no word in the whole dictionary has ever been applied to cover so many sins as thou hast. Thou art the robe of vanity every day; tricking it out in subscrip-

tion lists, almshouses, hospitals; thou art the cloak of pride and haughtiness, the pretext of every petty tyrant who seeks a slave, the excuse of avarice, and greed, and narrow-mindedness—ever, ever coupled with a lie! In what human heart art thou ever found pure and unadulterated? The foul-mouthed slanderer of a neighbour's fame, who gives a sixpence to a beggar, or a pound to an infirmary, is "*a charitable person*." The scoffing sneerer at virtue he cannot imitate, who flings away money profusely for the sole gratification of a loose habit, is called "*charitable*." The hard-hearted man who denies others their rights, or he who cheats his followers of their due reward, or he who grinds the faces of his workmen with excessive toil, or he who is harsh and stern in his own household, fierce and censorious to others; a despot with his wife, a tyrant with his children, dies, and, in a pompous will, bequeathes a portion of his ill-gotten wealth to build an asylum, and perpetuate his name, and is praised and honoured as "*a charitable man*."

That boy, forced to labour day and night,

without consideration, without comfort, without a kind word, fed upon refuse, palleted on straw, yet doing more than the whole household altogether, was taken in *from charity*! Believe it, reader, if you can. For my part, I don't believe a word of it. I am quite sure that worthy Mr. Groomber wanted somebody particularly, of an active and willing disposition, to carry out the beer, and to attend to all those little matters which Mr. Groomber could not do himself, and which his servants did not choose to do, and that in taking in Billy Lamb for his own convenience, he persuaded himself, and tried to persuade the public, too, that he was doing an act of *charity*. It is an extraordinary thing to consider how often in the great tragic farce of the world we are our own spectators; or, in other words, how continually, when we act a part, we consider ourselves one of the audience, and strive to deceive that individual the very first.

However that might be, there was Billy Lamb, the potboy, just before Doctor Miles, with an empty tankard in his hand; and the good

doctor no sooner beheld him, than he stopped, and, in a kindly tone, asked him how the world went with him. Now Doctor Miles was a great man in the neighbourhood; he had property of his own of some extent, which rendered the living that he held but an accessory to his principal means of subsistence. He did not live by the altar, but for the altar; and there are no such keen drawers of distinctions as the lower classes. Of this thing all clergymen may be sure, that he who makes a trade of his profession, who exacts the uttermost penny which he has a right to, and something more, who increases burial fees, and makes broad the borders of all his dues, will always be held in contempt. Of the butcher, the baker, and the grocer, the lower orders expect such things. The exaction of a farthing on half-a-pound more than is really just, they know is a part of the privilege of the knife, the oven, and the scales. But with the ministers of a pure and holy religion, the grand and fundamental principle of which is charity and abnegation of self, they expect a high and a

wide sense of benevolence, a large and disinterested view of the relations of a pastor and flock. Thick must be the veil that covers from the eyes of the humble and the needy that greedy and grasping spirit which too frequently, like the ghoul of Eastern fable, preys among the sepulchres of the dead, and takes advantage of the moment of overwhelming distress and agony of mind, to urge the coarse claims of sacerdotal avarice—claims but too frequently untenable in law, and always barbarous, even when not illegal—for dues which should be swept away for ever, which should no longer exist as a constant source of heartburning and complaint between pastor and people, making the one derive a portion of his living by laying a tax most onerous and hard to be borne, either upon the joys or the sorrows of his parishioners, and the others to look upon their teacher as one who sets at defiance the first principles of the Gospel that he preaches, following “avarice which is idolatry,” and forgetting charity, “which covers a multitude of sins.”

Luckily, both by position and inclination, Doctor Miles was exempt from all such reproaches. His necessities did not force him into meannesses, and his natural disposition would never have suffered him to fall into them, whatever his circumstances might have been. One heard nothing in his parish of enormous charges for "a brick grave," swollen surplice-fees, or any of those taxes upon death which would make a cholera, a plague, or a pestilence so rich a harvest, that the minister who would pray in his desk against plague, pestilence, and famine, would be the grossest of hypocrites. He did not look upon his churchyard as the most valuable and productive part of his glebe, to be manured by the corpses of his parishioners, and bear a cent-per-cent crop in monuments and grave-stones. The consecration of the bishop he did not look upon as fertilizing the land for his own enrichment, but contented himself with the bare amount of the moderate fee awarded by the law, and neither asked nor received a penny more. Some of the neighbouring clergy called him a weak and prejudiced man,

and exclaimed loudly against him for neglecting the interests, or, as they called them, "the rights of the church." But, somehow, his parishioners loved him, though he was rather an austere man, too, and never spared invective or exhortation in case of error and misconduct. The secret, perhaps, was, that they were convinced of his disinterestedness. He took from no man more than was his due ; he required of no man more than he had the warrant of Scripture for requiring. His private fortune gave him the means of charity, and to that object all his private fortune was devoted. Every one in the neighbourhood knew that Doctor Miles could have a finer house, could keep a better table, could maintain a smarter equipage ; but, at the same time, they were aware of two things—first, that his income was not as large as it might have been had he chosen to exact the uttermost farthing ; and, secondly, that it was not for the purpose of hoarding his money that he did not spend it upon himself.

Thus, Dr. Miles, as well may be conceived, was very much revered in the neighbour-

hood ; his rebukes were listened to, and sometimes taken to heart ; his advice was sought, and sometimes followed ; his opinions were always respected, if his injunctions were not always obeyed ; and his severity of manner was very well understood not to imply any real harshness of heart.

The cap was off Billy Lamb's head in a moment, when he approached Dr. Miles : but he did not venture to speak to him till the doctor, after gazing at him for a moment, in a fit of absence, exclaimed, " Ah, William, how goes it with you ? and how is your poor mother ? "

" Oh, quite well," replied the youth, in his peculiarly sweet, low voice ; " mother's better than she was, though she has never been well since poor Mary's death."

" How should she ?—how should she ? " exclaimed Doctor Miles ; " these things, my man, affect young people but little, old people but little ; for young people are full of their own life, and with them that consideration supercedes all thoughts connected with death ; and old people are so full of the conviction of life's

brevity, that the matter of a few years more or less is to them insignificant. It is to the middle-aged that the death of the young is terrible; it clouds the past with regrets, and the future with apprehensions. But I want to speak to your mother, Bill; she must forgive Stephen Gimlet, and try and help him, and be a comfort to him."

"I wish she would," said the boy, looking down; "I am sure Stephen is not so bad as people call him, and never would have taken poor Mary away, if people had not been so strict?"

"I must talk to her," answered Doctor Miles; "but you may tell her, if you see her before I do, that Stephen is a changed man, and Sir John Slingsby has taken him for a game-keeper.—Tell her, will you," he continued, after a moment's thought, "that the cottage on the moor has been burned down, and the poor little boy, Charley, would have been burnt in it, because there was no mother, nor other relation of any kind to help him, had it not been that a gentleman who is staying up at the hall

came by at the time, and rescued the boy from the flames."

"Ah, I am sure that was the gentleman that was down here," exclaimed the pot-boy; "Captain Hayward they called him; for he was a kind, good gentleman as ever lived, and gave me enough for mother to put something by against the winter."

"That is no reason why he should be walking on the moor," said Doctor Miles, quickly. "However, I must talk to her, for the boy must not be left alone any more; and we must see what can be done. But now tell me, Bill, what wages do you get?"

"A shilling a-week and my victuals," replied the boy, in an unrepining tone; "it is very kind of Mr. Groomber, I am sure; and I do what I can; but that's not much."

"Humph!" said Doctor Miles, with not the most affirmative tone in the world; "well, I'll come by and by, and see your mother; can you go down and tell her that I am coming?"

"Oh, yes, sir," replied the boy; "they give me a quarter of an hour to eat my dinner, so I

can go very well ; but I must go first to Mr. Slattery's, the doctor ; for Mrs. Billiter told me to bid him come quietly to Mr. Wittingham, as if just for a call ; for the old gentleman came home ill last night, and has taken to his bed."

"Mr. Slattery is out," replied Dr. Miles. "I met him on the road ; but leave the message, Bill, leave the message, and I will go up and see Mr. Wittingham myself."

Thus saying, he bade the boy adieu, and walked on to the smart white gates of Mr. Wittingham's highly-cultivated place, and, passing through the garden, rang the bell at the door, which was opened to him by a servant in a straight-cut blue coat, black and yellow striped waistcoat, and black plush breeches, with drab gaiters.

In answer to Doctor Miles's inquiry, the servant informed him that Mr. Wittingham was in bed, and could see no one ; but the worthy gentleman pressed for admission, saying that his business was of importance. A consultation then took place between the man-servant and the housekeeper, and, after some hesitation,

Mrs. Billiter went up to her master to inform him of Doctor Miles's visit, with a particular injunction to impress upon the mind of the sick man that the clergyman's business was of moment. She came down the next minute and begged the visiter to walk up, with as low a curtsy as her long stiff stays would permit her to make; and, she leading the way, Doctor Miles followed with a slow and meditative step.

The room door was gently unclosed, and the clergyman, entering, fixed his eyes upon the figure of Mr. Wittingham as he lay in the bed, and a sad sight it was. Terrible was the effect that one night of sickness had wrought upon him. The long, thin, bony limbs were plainly visible through the bed-clothes, and so far, Mr. Wittingham well, or Mr. Wittingham ill, showed no difference; but in the face upon the pillow were to be seen traces enough, more of suffering than sickness. The features had suddenly grown sharp, and the cheeks hollow; the eye was bright and wandering, the brow furrowed, and the hue of the complexion, partly from the light-brown moreen curtain of the bed—the

most detestable curtains in the world—partly from a sleepless, anxious, suffering night, had grown yellow, if not cadaverous. Patches of short-cut gray hair, usually concealed by the wig, were now suffered, by the night-cap, to show themselves upon the temples. The large front teeth, the high nose and the protuberant chin, were all more prominent than usual; and certainly Mr. Wittingham, in cotton nightcap and clean linen sheets, was not the most prepossessing person that ever the eye rested upon.

Doctor Miles, however, advanced quietly to his bedside, and opened the conversation in a kindly tone.

“I am sorry to find you ill, my good friend,” he said; “you seemed well enough last night.”

“Ay, ay, that’s another thing, doctor,” replied the invalid; “but I got a terrible fright after that, and that has given me quite a turn.”

“As to the way you will direct that turn,” answered the clergyman, “you will need some good advice, Mr. Wittingham.”

“Ay, ay,” said the magistrate, somewhat

impatiently. "Billiter there has been boring me for an hour to send for that fellow Slattery; but I don't think he could do me any good. He is a humbug, as well as most of those doctors."

"But not more than most," answered Doctor Miles, "which is a great thing in this part of the country. You may go, Mrs. Billiter; I wish to be alone with Mr. Wittingham."

Mrs. Billiter, who had remained upon the best, the oldest, and most invariable excuse, that of putting the room in order, for the purpose of gaining an insight into all that took place, dropped a curtsy, and withdrew unwillingly.

Mr. Wittingham eyed Doctor Miles with a shrewd, inquiring, but timid glance. It was evident that he would have dispensed with the doctor's coming, that he did not half like it, that he wished to know what he could want, why he came, what was his business, what could be his object, and why his manner was so grave and cautious. Heaven knows that Mr. Wittingham was not an imaginative man—

that he was not subject to the sports of fancy, and seldom or ever presented to his mind any image of things, past or future, unless it were in a great parchment-covered volume, in which was inscribed in large letters, upon the last page: "Balance, in favour of Mr. Wittingham, sixty-nine thousand odd hundred pounds." Nevertheless, on this occasion the worthy gentleman's imagination ran restive; for, as a weedy old horse, when people endeavour to whip it into anything more than its ordinary pace, turns up its heels, and flings them into the face of its driver, so did Mr. Wittingham's fancy at once assert its predominance over reason, by presenting to him for his choice every possible sort of business upon which Doctor Miles might, could, would, should, or ought to have come to Tarningham Lodge. He, therefore, sat in his bed with his nightcap on his head, grinning at him, like Yorick's skull, with a ghastly smile. Courtesy has its agonies, as well as other things; and the politeness of Mr. Wittingham was agonizing. Speak he could not, that was out of the question; but,

with a grim contortion of countenance, he motioned the worthy doctor to a chair, and the other took it with a provoking deliberation, concealing, under an air of imperturbable coolness, a certain degree of embarrassment, and a considerable degree of feeling.

To tell the truth, he much desired that Mr. Wittingham would begin first; but he soon saw that there was no hope of such being the case; and his profession had accustomed him to the initiative. Wherefore, after three preliminary hums, he went on to say, "My dear sir, I thought it better to come down to you to-day, to speak to you on a somewhat painful subject, but one which had better be grappled with at once; and that rather in conversation with me, a minister of peace and goodwill towards men, than with others, who, though equally bound by the injunctions of the religion which I unworthily teach and they believe, have what they consider duties apart, which might interfere with an unlimited exercise of Christian charity."

Excellent Doctor Miles, you are keeping

the poor man in a state of torture. Why will you preach, when you are not in the pulpit? But Doctor Miles was not a prosy man by nature; he was short, brief, and terse in his general conversation, and only preached when he was in the pulpit or in embarrassment. That such was the case at present greatly increased the evils of Mr. Wittingham's position; and when the doctor was talking of Christian charity, the sick magistrate was mentally sending him to a place where very little charity of any kind is supposed to be practised—not that we know anything of the matter; for even in the present day, with steamboats, railroads, and all the appliances of human ingenuity to boot, tourists and travellers have not pushed their researches quite as far as the place alluded to—or, at all events, have not favoured the world with an account of their discoveries.

After the above proem, Dr. Miles stumbled for a moment or two, and then recovering himself, continued thus:

“The unfortunate affair which took place last night must doubtless give rise to legal

inquiries, which will, depend upon it, be pursued with great energy and determination ; for Captain Hayward, I find, followed the unhappy young man at once ; and, if I judge rightly, he is not one to abandon his object when it is but half attained."

"Oh, that Captain Hayward—that Captain Hayward !" cried Wittingham, angrily ; "he is always meddling with other people's affairs."

"Nay, my dear sir," answered Dr. Miles ; "this was his affair, and the affair of everybody in the room. The ball passed within an inch of his friend Mr. Beauchamp's head, and might have been intended for him—at least, so Captain Hayward might have supposed, had not your own exclamation at the moment——"

"My exclamation !" cried Mr. Wittingham, with a look of horror ; "what did I exclaim ?"

Doctor Miles did not answer him directly at first, replying merely, "you said enough, Mr. Wittingham, to show who it was, in your opinion, that fired the shot."

Mr. Wittingham clasped his hands together in an agony of despair, and sunk with his head

upon the pillow, as if he would fain have hid his face in the bed-clothes; but Dr. Miles went on kindly to say—

“Moreover, my dear sir, your exclamation was sufficient to make me feel for you deeply—to feel for you with sincere compassion, and to desire anxiously to serve and assist you.”

Now, Mr. Wittingham was not accustomed to be compassionated; he did not like the thing, and he did not like the word; he was a vain man and a proud man, and compassion was a humiliation which he did not like to undergo; but still anxiety and trouble were the strongest, and he repeated two or three times, in a quick, sharp voice—

“What did I say?—What did I say?”

“You said that it was your son,” answered the clergyman; “and various corroborative circumstances have transpired which——”

But by this time Mr. Wittingham was in such a state of agitation, that it was evident he would hear nothing further that was said to him at the moment, and therefore the good doctor stopped short. The magistrate covered

his eyes; he wrung his hands hard together; he gazed forth at the sky; he even wept.

“Then it is all over—all over,” he cried, at length,—“it is all over.” By which he meant, that all his dreams of importance, his plans of rural grandeur and justice-of-the-peaceism, his “reverence” on the bench, and at the quarter-sessions, his elevation as a country gentleman, and his oblivion as a small trader, were all frustrated, gone, lost, smothered, and destroyed by his son’s violent conduct, and his own indiscreet babbling in the moment of fear and grief.

“Ah, Doctor Miles,” he said, “it’s a sad business—a sad business! As you know it all, there is no use of my holding my tongue. Harry did do it; and, indeed, he told me before that he would do it, or something like it: for he came here—here, down into Tarningham, and told me on the very bench, that if I pushed that business about Mrs. Clifford’s carriage any further, it should go worse with me. It was a threat, my dear doctor; and I was not to be deterred from doing my duty by

a threat, and so I told him, and immediately took up the man they call Wolf, on suspicion; for Sir John had been down here, swearing at my door—and what could I do, you know?”

Now, Doctor Miles had seen a great deal of the world; and though a good and benevolent man, and one not at all inclined to think the worst of one of his fellow-creatures, yet he could not help seeing that there was a great deal of weakness, and eagerness to shuffle any burden from himself in Mr. Wittingham's reply. There are certain sorts of knowledge which force themselves upon our understanding, whether we will or not, and amongst these is discrimination of human character. People long accustomed to the world find great difficulty in believing a practised liar, however much they may wish to do so on certain points. They also see through, in spite of themselves, all the little petty artifices with which *self* hides itself from *self*, and still more clearly through the mean policy by which the mean man strives to conceal his meanness from the eyes of his fellow-creatures. Whether it be the pitiful

man, in any of the common walks of life, exacting more than his due, and striving to hide his greed under the veil of liberality and disinterestedness, whether it be the candidate, on the canvass or on the hustings, escaping from the explanation of his intentions upon the plea of independence and free judgment, or whether it be the minister of the crown, evading the fulfilment of obligations, or shrinking from the recognition of support, by all the thousand subterfuges in the vast dictionary of political dishonesty, the man learned in the world's ways, however willing to be duped, cannot believe and confide, cannot admire and respect. The case with Mr. Wittingham was a very simple one. Doctor Miles saw and understood the whole process of his mind in a moment; but he was sorry for the man; he felt what agony it must be to have such a son, and he hastened as far as possible to relieve him.

"I think, my dear sir," he said, "that you have made some mistakes in this matter. I do not presume to interfere with any man's domestic arrangements, but I will candidly

acknowledge that I have thought, in watching the progress of your son's education, that it was not likely to result in good to his character—nay, hear me out; for I am only making this observation as a sort of excuse, not so much for him, as for the advice I am going to give you, which can only be justified by a belief that the young man is not so depraved by nature as by circumstances.”

They were hard words—very hard words, that Doctor Miles uttered, but there was a stern impressiveness in his manner which overawed Mr. Wittingham, kept down his vanity from revolting against the implied accusation, and prevented him from even writhing openly at the plain terms in which his son's conduct was stigmatized.

“Under these circumstances,” continued Doctor Miles, “I think it much better that you send your son out of the country as fast as possible: afford him such means as will enable him to live in respectability, without indulging in vice; warn him seriously of the end to which his present courses will lead him, and

give him to understand that if he abandons them, and shows an inclination to become a good and useful member of society, the faults of his youth may be forgotten, and their punishment be remitted. On the latter point, I think I may say that, should he at once quit the country, no further steps against him will be taken. You know very well that Sir John Slingsby, though hot and irascible, is a very kind and good-natured man at heart."

"Sir John Slingsby!" exclaimed Mr. Wittingham, bustling up with an air of relief, as if something had suddenly turned a screw, or opened a safety-valve, and delivered him from the high pressure of Doctor Miles's grave and weighty manner; "Sir John Slingsby, sir, dare do nothing against me or mine; for there is a balance against him. He may talk, and he may bully, and crack his jokes. I have submitted to all that a great deal too long, without requiring a settlement of the account,—and there's five thousand pounds against him, I can tell you, which he will find it a difficult matter to pay, I have a notion—ah, ah, Doctor

Miles, I know what I am about. Five thousand pounds are five thousand pounds, Doctor Miles—and I know all the situation of Sir John's affairs, too; so he had better not meddle with me: he had better not enrage me; for he will risk less in letting all this foolish business pass off quietly without inquiry, than producing inquiry into his own affairs in the county. A good jolly gentleman, I don't mean to say he is not; but I can tell you he is tottering on the verge of ruin, and I don't want to force him over unless he drives me: and so he had better not—that's all!"

Doctor Miles had gazed at him as he spoke with a keen, subacid smile, and in some degree even of amusement; and this calm, supercilious look greatly annoyed and embarrassed Mr. Wittingham towards the end of his tirade. It was evident that Doctor Miles was not in the least taken unprepared, that the intimation of Sir John Slingsby's position in worldly affairs neither surprised nor disappointed him in the least; and when Mr. Wittingham at length stopped in some embarrassment, his reply

tended still further to puzzle and confound the worthy magistrate, for he merely said—

“Perhaps so, Mr. Wittingham, but I do not think Sir John Slingsby’s pecuniary circumstances will at all prevent him from performing his public duties. If he has reason to believe that your son is in the road to amendment, he is very likely to look over his present offences, as they are, in some degree, personal to himself and his family. If he imagines that he will go on from one crime to another, depend upon it he will think it only right to cut his career short at once. The only fear is, that if this debt which you speak of ever crosses his mind, it will only serve as a bar to his lenity; for no man is so likely to be seized with a sudden determination to punish with the utmost rigour, if he suspect for one moment that his debt to you, whatever the amount is, may be assigned as the motive by any one for his forbearance. I would not advise you to urge such a plea, Mr. Wittingham; but, depend upon it, if this debt is considered at all, it will be considered to your disadvantage. Besides all this, you

must recollect that other persons were present ; therefore Sir John has not the whole matter in his own hands. However, I have given you the best advice in my power ; you can take it, if you like ; if not, the consequences be upon your own head ; and you must not blame any one for anything that may occur in the due course of law.

And, rising from the bed-side, he was about to depart, when Mr. Wittingham stopped him.

“Stay, stay, my dear sir,” said the magistrate, eagerly ; “let us discuss this question a little further. I wish no harm to Sir John Slingsby, and I trust he wishes none to me. But are you sure there were other persons who heard the words I spoke ? Very unfortunate—very unfortunate, indeed.”

Now the truth was, that Mr. Wittingham was in a state of high irritation. The comments which Dr. Miles had made, or rather the hints which he had thrown out in regard to the education of his son, had greatly exasperated him. He never liked it to be even hinted that he was wrong ; it was a sort of accusation

which he never could bear; and the worthy doctor would have been permitted in patience to proceed with any other of Mr. Wittingham's friends or enemies without the least interruption; but it was natural that he should take fire in regard to his son. Why natural? it may be asked. For this reason, that the education of his son was associated intimately with Mr. Wittingham's own vanity; and the idea of his faults being owing to education, was a direct reflection upon Mr. Wittingham himself.

Doctor Miles, however, regarded none of these things; and though the worthy magistrate desired him to stay, he declared he had no time, saying—

“Further discussion is out of the question. I have given you advice that I know to be kind, that I believe to be good. Take it, if you judge so; leave it, if you judge otherwise. Pursue what course you think best in regard to Sir John Slingsby; but, at all events, do not attempt to influence him by pecuniary considerations; for be assured that, although he

may, by imprudence, have embarrassed his property, he has not arrived at that pitch of degradation which is only brought on step by step from the pressure of narrow circumstances, and which induces men to forget great principles in order to escape from small difficulties. Good morning, Mr. Wittingham ;” and, without further pause, Doctor Miles quitted the room, and walked down stairs. In the hall he met Mr. Wharton, the attorney, going up, with a somewhat sour and discontented face ; but all that passed between the two gentlemen was a cold bow, and the clergyman left the house in possession of the lawyer.

CHAPTER IX.

IT is a very unpleasant position indeed to be above your neck in the water, with another man holding fast by your collar, especially if it be by both hands. It may be a friend who has so got you, it may be an enemy ; but the operation comes to pretty nearly the same thing in both cases ; and that the result is not at all an agreeable one, I say it boldly, and without fear of contradiction ; for, although drowning is said to be accompanied by no real pain, and I have heard many half-drowned persons declare that it is rather pleasant than otherwise, yet that is only a part of the process, not the result ; then, again, excellent Sir Peter Laurie

can witness, that there are multitudes of persons, who, after having taken one suffocating dip in Mother Thames, repeat the attempt perseveringly, as if they found it very delightful indeed; but still I contend that they have not come to the end of the thing, and, therefore, can give no real opinion. "To lie in cold obstruction and to rot," to become the prey of the lean, abhorred monster, Death, to separate from the warm tenement in which our abode on earth has been made, to part with the companionship of all the senses and sensations, the thrills and feelings, which have been our friends, our guides, our monitors, our servants, our officers in the course of mortal existence—this is the result of that tight pressure upon the cravat or coat-collar which we shrink from, when, with our head under the water, we feel the fingers of friend or enemy approaching too near the organs of respiration. If the gentleman grasps our legs, we can kick him off; if he seizes our hands, we can often shake him away; but the deadly pressure upon the chest and neck, the clinging, grasping energy of those

small digits on the throat, when we find that, half a second more and life is gone, is perhaps as unpleasant a thing as often falls to the lot of mortal man to feel.

Now, Ned Hayward, I have endeavoured to impress upon the reader's mind, was a brave, bold, determined fellow as ever lived. There was no danger he would not have fronted—no fate he would not have risked for a good and worthy object. He was a good swimmer, too; but when, after a headlong plunge into the water, he felt himself undermost in the fall, out of his depth, his feet entangled in a weed, and the fingers and thumbs of Captain Moreton tight upon his throat, he was seized with an irresistible propensity to knock him off by any means, even at the risk of losing his prisoner. The first method that suggested itself was a straightforward blow at his adversary, and that taking effect upon his chest, was successful with a man half-drowned himself. His antagonist let go his hold, rose as fast as he could, dashed at the other bank, gained the ground, and was off. Poor Ned Hayward, however,

soon found that if he had freed himself from one enemy, he was still in the power of another. It is a terrible thing that a strong, powerful man, instinct with every energy and quality of high animal life, and, moreover, having an immortal soul, to be kept or parted with, should every now and then be completely at the mercy of a thin, pitiful, pulpy weed, which, to all appearances, might be broken in a moment. But moments are very important things, and the *vis inertię* a tremendous power. The weed made no attempt to hold the young gentleman—it neither grasped his legs, nor clasped his knees, but it was carried by the current around the ankles of Ned Hayward, and there, somehow or other, it stuck fast, preventing him from moving; in fact, it was like many a great politician (in the world's opinion), who operate many great changes upon their neighbours by mere *vis inertię*, waiting till the tide of circumstances brings them to action, and then holding fast to a particular point till all opposition is drowned.

Such had well-nigh been the case with Ned

Hayward; for what little strength he had left was nearly expended in the blow he gave to Captain Moreton; and when he found that his feet were entangled in a weed which would not have snapped a single gut-line with a May-fly at the end of it, his powers did not suffice to tear himself away. This history, as far as he was concerned, seemed likely to come to a hasty conclusion, when suddenly he found a strong hand grasp his arm just below the shoulder, and give his whole frame a vehement impulse towards the surface of the water. The next instant he saw, heard, breathed, once more; and before he had time to do either of these things above a second, he found his right elbow leaning on the bank, and Mr. Beauchamp, who was not very well aware whether he was dead, alive, or half-drowned, endeavouring to draw him up on the bank. To use the words of the poet—in a very indecent episode of a very chaste and beautiful poem—

“ One stupid moment motionless he stood ;”

but the next puff of the right element which went into his lungs recalled all his activity, and

up he jumped on the bank with a spring which astonished Beauchamp, made Isabella Slingsby draw back, and brought a faint colour into Mary Clifford's cheek. The glow was accompanied by a smile, however, which showed that this proof of Ned Hayward's still active powers was not unpleasant to her.

The first thing the young officer did, however, was to shake Mr. Beauchamp warmly by the hand, exclaiming—

“Upon my life you were just in time—it was nearly over with me—I could not have stood it half a minute longer. Everything was turning green, and I know that's a bad sign.”

The next thing was to pick up his fishing-rod and tackle, crying, as he raised them from the ground,

“He has frightened away that big old trout; I should have had him in another second; I may have to walk half an hour more before I find such another; I could see him eyeing the fly all ready for a rise.”

“But who was the gentleman?”

“What was the quarrel about?”

“Why did you seize him?” demanded Isabella, Mary, and Beauchamp, all together.

Let the reader remark, that each framed his question differently.

“That is the man who fired the shot into the window last night,” replied Ned Hayward, looking curiously at the fly upon his hook; and two of his companions instantly turned their eyes in the direction which Captain Moreton had taken, with a look of alarm, as if they feared he would fire another shot from the bushes amongst which he had disappeared. Beauchamp, for his part, cast down his eyes, and said nothing—not a word! Nay, more—he shut his teeth close, and drew his lips over them, as if he were afraid he should say something; and then, after a minute’s pause, he turned to Ned Hayward, saying,

“Had you not better give up this fishing, come up to the house, and change your clothes?”

“Oh dear, no!” cried Ned Hayward, “on no account whatever; I’ll catch my fish before twelve o’clock yet; and very likely have the very fellow that our plunge scared away. Do

you know, Beauchamp, it is sometimes not a bad plan to frighten a cunning old speckled gentleman like this, if you find that he is suspicious and wont bite. I have tried it often, and found it succeed very well. He gets into a fuss, dashes up or down, does not know well where to stop, and then, out of mere irritation, bites at the first thing that is thrown in his way. Come along, and we shall see. He went down, I think, for I had an eye upon him until he darted off."

"But you are very wet, too, Mr. Beauchamp," said Isabella. "If Captain Hayward is too much of an old campaigner to change his clothes, I do not see why you should neglect to do so."

"For the best reason in the world, my dear Miss Slingsby," replied Beauchamp, "because I have no clothes here with which to change these I have on."

"But there are plenty at the house," replied Isabella, eagerly.

"But I am afraid they would not fit," replied Beauchamp, laughing. "I am in no fear, how-

ever; for I am as old a campaigner as Captain Hayward."

"Let us move about, at all events," said Mary Clifford; and following Ned Hayward down the stream, they watched his progress, as he, intent apparently upon nothing but his sport, went flogging the water, to see what he could obtain. Three or four very large trout, skilfully hooked, artistically played, and successfully landed, soon repaid his labour; but Ned Hayward was not yet satisfied; and at length, he paused abruptly, and held up his finger to the others as a sign not to approach too near. He was within about twenty yards of a spot where the stream, taking a slight bend, entered into a sort of pass between two low copses, one on either hand, composed of thin and feathery trees, the leaves of which, slightly agitated by the wind, cast a varying and uncertain light and shade upon the water. The river, where he stood, was quite smooth; but ten steps further, it fell over two or three small plates of rock, which scattered and disturbed it as it ran, leaving a bubbling rapid beyond,

and then a deep, but rippling pool, with two or three sharp whirls in it, just where the shadows of the leaves were dancing on the waters. Ned Hayward deliberately took the fly off the line and put on another, fixing his eye, from time to time, on a particular spot in the pool beyond. He then threw his line on the side of the rapid next to him, let the fly float down with a tremulous motion, kept it playing up and down on the surface of the foam, with a smile upon his lips, then suffered it to be carried rapidly on into the bubbling pool, as if hurried away by the force of the water, and held it for a moment quivering there; the next moment he drew it sharply towards him, but not far. There was an instant rush in the stream, and a sharp snap, which you might almost hear. The slightest possible stroke of the rod was given, and then the line ran rapidly off, while the patriarch of the stream dashed away with the hook in his jaws. The instant he paused, he was wound up, and drawn gently along, and then he dashed away again, floundered and splashed, and struck the shallow

waters with his tail, till, at length, exhausted and half-drowned, he was drawn gradually up to the rocks; and Ned Hayward, wading in, landed him safely on the shore.

“This is the game of life, Miss Clifford,” he said, as he put the trout of more than three pounds weight into the basket. “Rendered cautious and prudent by some sad experiences, we shrink from everything that seems too easy of attainment: then, when we find something that Fate’s cunning hand plays before our eyes as if to be withdrawn in a moment, we watch it with suspicious but greedy eagerness, till we think a moment more will lose it for ever, then dart at it blindly, and feel the hook in our jaws.”

Mary Clifford smiled, and then looked grave; and Isabella laughed, exclaiming—

“The moral of fly-fishing! And a good lesson, I suppose, you mean, for all over-cautious mammas—or did you mean it was a part of your own history, Captain Hayward, retrospective or prophetic? or was it a general disquisition upon man?”

“I am afraid man is the trout,” said Beauchamp; “and not in one particular pursuit, but all; love, interest, ambition, every one alike. His course and end are generally the same.”

“That speech of yours, fair lady, was so like a woman,” said Ned Hayward, turning to Miss Slingsby, “if it were not that my hands are wet, I would presume upon knowing you as a child, and give you a good shake. I thought you had been brought up enough with men, to know that they are not always thinking of love and matrimony. You women have but one paramount idea—as to this life’s concerns I mean—and you never hear anything without referring it to that. However, after all, perhaps it is natural:—

“ ‘Man’s love is of man’s life a thing apart—
’Tis woman’s whole existence.’ ”

“Too sad a truth,” replied Mary Clifford, thoughtfully; “perhaps it is of too little importance in man’s eyes—of too much in woman’s.”

“And yet how terribly she sometimes trifles

with it," said Beauchamp, in a still gloomier tone.

"Perhaps you think she trifles with everything, Mr. Beauchamp?" rejoined Isabella; "but men know so little of women, and see so little of women as they really are, that they judge the many from the few; and we must forgive them. Nevertheless, even if it be true that women do trifle with love, it is not the least proof that they do not feel it. All beings are fond of sporting with what is bright and dangerous: the moth round the candle, the child with the penknife, and man with ambition."

"All mankind," said Ned Hayward, "men and women alike, get merrily familiar with that which is frequently presented to their thoughts. Look at the undertaker, or the sexton, how he jests with his fat corpse, and only screws his face into a grim look when he has the world's eye upon him; then jumps upon the hearse and canters back, to get drunk and joyous at the next public-house."

"Hush! hush! Captain Hayward," cried

Isabella. "I declare your figures of speech are too horrible ; we will have no more of such sad conversation ; can we not talk of something more pleasant as we go back ?"

"I don't know," said Ned Hayward ; "I am in a moralizing mood this morning."

And as Isabella and Mr. Beauchamp walked on a little in advance to pass the narrow path, which only admitted two abreast, he continued in a somewhat lower tone, saying to Mary Clifford—

"I cannot get my spirits up this morning. The dangerous circumstances of my good old friend, Sir John, vex me much. Have you spoken to your cousin about them ? She seems wonderfully gay ?"

"I have," answered Miss Clifford ; "but it would need a heavy weight, Captain Hayward, to sink her light heart. She promised to mention the matter to Mr. Beauchamp, too ; but I rather imagine, from what has occurred, that she had not done it."

"Oh, she has done it, depend upon it !" replied the young officer ; "and that is what

makes her so gay. But I must speak with Beauchamp myself, and make the matter sure."

In the meantime, Beauchamp had walked on with Isabella; and there could be little or no doubt, in the mind of any one who came behind them, that he was making love. Not that Ned Hayward and his fair companion heard a word that was said—no, not a single syllable; but there is a peculiar gesture associated with the making of love, by a gentleman at least, which distinguishes it from every other process. Beauchamp, as we have described him, was about the middle height; but Isabella was not below it; and there was not the slightest occasion for him to bend down his head, in order that she might hear him distinctly, unless he had something to say which he did not wish others to hear likewise. He did bend down his head, however, and said what he had to say in a very low tone; and, although he did not stare her rudely in the face, yet from time to time he looked into her eyes, as if he thought them the crystal win-

dows of the heart. Isabella, on her side, did not bend her head: she held it a little on one side, indeed, so as in the least perceptible degree to turn the fine small ear to the words that were poured into it; generally, however, she looked down, with the long fringes veiling the violet of her eyes, though from time to time she raised them at something he said; and when her look met his, they fell again. They had to cross over a little brook, and Beauchamp took her hand to help her over. He drew it through his arm when he had done, and there it rested for the remainder of the walk.

Involuntarily and almost unconsciously as they marked this, Mary Clifford and Captain Hayward turned to each other with a smile. The impulse with each was to see if the other had remarked it—a very simple impulse—but when their looks met, it made a more compound phrase; and the anagram of the heart might read thus:

“May we not as well make love, too?”

It was a sore temptation; but the next

instant Ned Hayward's countenance became exceedingly grave, and the warm healthy glow in his cheek grew a shade paler.

If there was a struggle in his breast, it was brought to an end in about five minutes; for, just as they were climbing the side of the hill again, they were met by joyous old Sir John Slingsby, whose whole face and air generally bore with it an emanation of cheerful content, which is usually supposed, but, alas! mistakenly, to be the peculiar portion of the good and wise. Thoughtlessness, temperament, habit, often possess that which is the coveted possession of wisdom and virtue; and often in this world the sunshine of the heart spreads over the pathway of him who neither sees his own misfortunes lying before him, nor thinks of the sorrows of others scattered around.

"Ah, boys and girls, boys and girls!" cried the baronet, laughing, "whither have you wandered so long? I have done a world of business since you have been gone, thank Heaven! and, thank Heaven, have left a world undone! so I shall never, like Alexander, that

maudlin, drunken, rattle-pate of antiquity, have to weep for new worlds to conquer. Ned Hayward, Ned Hayward, I have a quarrel with you! Absent from evening drill and morning parade without leave! We will have you tried by a court-martial, boy; but what news have you brought? did you overtake the enemy, or was he too much for you? Whither is he retreated? and last, though not least, who and what is he?"

"On my life, Sir John, I do not know who he is," answered Ned Hayward. "We have had two engagements, in which, I am fain to confess, he has had the advantage, and has retreated in good order both times. I shall catch him yet, however; but at present I have not time to give full information; for——"

"Not time—not time!" cried the baronet; "what the devil have you done with all your time, not to have half an hour to spare to your old colonel?"

"In the first place, my dear sir, I am wet," replied the young officer, "for I have been in the water, and must change my clothes; but I

have won my bet, however—I promised to catch the best trout in the river before noon; and there he is—match him if you can!”

“Before noon,” exclaimed Sir John Slingsby, taking out his watch; “twenty minutes past twelve, by Jove!”

“Ay, but he has been caught twenty minutes,” said Ned Hayward. “I will appeal to all persons present.”

“Well, granted, granted,” exclaimed the baronet—“the bet’s won, the bet’s won! You shall change your clothes, make yourself look like a gentleman, and then tell the reverend company your story.”

“Impossible,” answered Ned Hayward, shaking his head; “I have forty things to do.”

“Forty things,” cried Sir John; “why, I have finished two hundred and fifty, upon a moderate computation, within an hour and ten minutes.”

“Ah, my dear sir,” said the young gentleman, “but I have got to change my clothes, write a letter, speak two words to Beauchamp, talk for a quarter of an hour to Ste Gimlet

about his boy's education, pack up some clothes, and be down at Tarningham in time for the coach to London, as well as to induce your butler to give me some luncheon, and a glass of the best old sherry in your cellar."

"Pack up some clothes!—coach to London!" cried Sir John Slingsby, in a more serious tone than he had yet used; "the boy is mad—his head is turned! Ned Hayward, Ned Hayward! what the devil do you mean, Ned Hayward?"

"Simply, my dear Sir John, that some business of importance calls me to London immediately," rejoined his young friend; "but I shall be down again to-morrow, or the next day at the furthest; and, in the meantime, I leave you horse and gun, fishing-tackle and appurtenances, which I give you free leave and licence to confiscate if I do not keep my word."

"Well, well," exclaimed the baronet, "go along, change your clothes, and come and get some luncheon. I always thought you a great donkey, Ned, and now I think so more than ever, when I see you quit comfortable quarters

for a dull stage-coach. Go along, I say—go along ; there's the door, which is always better said on the outside of a house than in the in."

"Thank you, Sir John ; but I must speak a word with Beauchamp first," replied Captain Hayward ; and taking his new friend's arm, he drew a little on one side, while the baronet and the two ladies entered the house.

"I have got a favour to ask you, Beauchamp," said Captain Hayward : "matters have got into a complication between myself and this young Wittingham, which may require a pistol-shot to unravel it. The fellow, who fired through the window last night, certainly rode his horse ; I walked straight into his room, thinking I might find the man there. I told him the occasion of my coming ; he was insolent ; and I informed him civilly what I thought of him ; he demanded satisfaction ; and I replied, that if there was a gentleman in the county that could be found to act as his friend, I would do him the honour of meeting him. Business, which one of the two ladies will give you a hint of, if they have not done so already, calls

me immediately to London. I have written to tell him so, adding that I shall be down the day after to-morrow. In the meantime, I shall tell the people at the White Hart, if any one comes from him, to refer them to you. Arrange the affair, therefore, for me, should such be the case, and, remember, the earliest possible time and the quietest possible manner—I'll bring my pistols—but we must break off, here comes Sir John Slingsby again; not a word to him on any account, there's a good fellow; and now let us talk of something else."

CHAPTER X.

IF you fix your eyes upon a distant hill in the month of April, in some countries, or May in others, there are a thousand chances to one, unless the goddess of the spring be very much out of humour, that you see first a golden gleam, warm as the looks of love, and next a deep blue shadow, calm and grand as the thoughts of high intellect when passion has passed away with youth. Perhaps the case may be reversed; the shadow come first and the gleam succeed, just as you happen to time your look; but at all events, you will require no one to tell you—you will not even need to raise your face to the sky to perceive at once that the cause of

this beautiful variation of hues is the alternate sunshine and cloud of the spring heavens.

Over the mind and over the face of man, however, what cloud, what sunshine, what gleams, what shadows, will not come without any eye but an all-seeing one being able to trace the causes of the change. Thrice in one morning was the whole demeanour of Mr. Beauchamp totally altered. He descended to breakfast grave and thoughtful; an hour after he was gayer than he had been for years. By the side of Isabella Slingsby he remained cheerful; but before luncheon was over he had plunged again into a fit of deep and gloomy thought, and as soon as Ned Hayward, having taken some food and wine, started up to mount his horse, which was at the door, Beauchamp rose also, saying, "I want one word with you, Hayward, before you go."

"Directly—directly!" answered Ned Hayward. "Good-bye, Sir John—good-bye, Miss Slingsby."

"Mind—day after to-morrow at the latest, Ned," cried the baronet.

“Upon my honour!” replied Hayward.
“Farewell, Mrs. Clifford; I trust I shall find you here on my return.”

“I fear not, Captain Hayward,” replied the lady; “but you have promised, you know, to come over and——”

“Nay, dear mamma, I think you will be here,” said Mary Clifford; “I think for once I shall attempt to coax you.”

Mrs. Clifford seemed somewhat surprised at her daughter’s eagerness to stay; but Sir John exclaimed, joyously, “There’s a good girl—there’s a capital girl, Mary; you are the best little girl in the world. She’ll stay—she’ll stay! We’ll get up a conspiracy against her. There, be off, Ned. No long leave-takings. You’ll find us all here when you come back, just as you left us: me, as solemn and severe as usual, my sister as gay and jovial, Isabella as pensorous, and Mary as merry and madcap as ever.”

Ned Hayward, however, did not fail to bid Miss Clifford adieu before he went, and, be it remarked, he did it in a somewhat lower tone

than usual, and added a few more words than he had spoken to the rest. Beauchamp accompanied him to the door, and then pausing near the house, inquired in a low tone, "Are you quite certain the man with whom you had the struggle this morning is the same who fired the shot last night?"

"Perfectly," answered Ned Hayward, "for I saw his face quite well in the sand-pit; and I never forget a face. I wish to Heaven we could catch him!"

"Have you any idea of his name?" asked Beauchamp.

"None in the world," replied Ned Hayward; "but there are two people here who must know, I think. One is young Wittingham, and the other is Ste Gimlet, otherwise Wolf. I have a strong notion this fellow was one of those attacking the carriage the other night. But that puts me in mind, Beauchamp, that I intended to go up and talk to Gimlet, but I have not time now. I wish you would; and just tell him from me, I will pay his boy's schooling if he will send him to learn some-

thing better than making bird-traps. You can perhaps find out at the same time who this fellow is, so it may be worth a walk."

"I will, I will!" answered Beauchamp; "but you said the young ladies here had something to tell me. What is it?"

"I thought they had done it," replied Ned Hayward; "that is stupid! But I have not time now; you must ask them; good bye," and touching his horse lightly with his heel, he was soon on his way to Tarningham.

Beauchamp paused for a moment on the steps in deep meditation, and then turned into the house, saying to himself, "This must be inquired into instantly." He found Sir John Slingsby in the luncheon-room, reading the newspaper, but nobody else, for the ladies had returned to the drawing-room, and two of them, at least, were looking somewhat anxiously for his coming. It very rarely happens that any one who is looked anxiously for ever does come; and, of course, in the present instance, Beauchamp took the natural course, and disappointed the two ladies.

“I have a message to deliver from Captain Hayward to your new keeper, Sir John,” he said; “and therefore I will walk over to his cottage, and see him. An hour, I dare say, will accomplish it.”

“It depends upon legs, my dear sir,” answered the baronet, looking up. “It would cost my two an hour and a half to go and come; so if I might advise, you would take four. You will find plenty of hoofs in the stables, and a groom to show you the way. Thus you will be back the sooner, and the women will have something to talk to; for I must be busy—very busy—devilish busy, indeed! I have not done any business for ten years, the lawyer tells me, so I must work hard to-day. I’ll read the papers first, however, if Wharton himself stood at the door; and he is a great deal worse than Satan. I like to hear all the lies that are going about in the world, and as newspapers were certainly invented for the propagation of falsehood, one is sure to find all there. Take a horse—take a horse, Beauchamp! Life is too short to walk

three miles and back to speak with a game-keeper."

" Well, Sir John, I will, with many thanks," answered his guest, and in about a quarter of an hour he was trotting away towards the new cottage of Stephen Gimlet, with groom to show him the way. That way was a very picturesque one, cutting off an angle of the moor, and then winding through wild lanes, rich with all sorts of flowers and shrubs, till at length a small old gray church appeared in view at the side of a little green. The stone, where the thick ivy hid it not was incrustated in many places with yellow, white, and brown lichens, giving that peculiar, rich hue with which nature is so fond of investing old buildings. There was but one other edifice of any kind in the neighbourhood, and that was a small cottage of two stories, built close against the side of the church. Probably it had originally been the abode of the sexton, and the ivy stretching forth from the neighbouring buttress had caught and twined round the chimneys, meeting several lower shoots of the same creeping plant, and enveloped

one whole moiety in a green mantle. The sunshine was streaming from behind the church, between it and the cottage, and that ray made the whole scene look cheerful enough; but yet Beauchamp could not help thinking, "This place, with its solitary house and lonely church, its little green, and the small fields behind with their close hedge-rows, must look somewhat desolate in dull weather. Still the house seems a comfortable one, and there has been care bestowed upon the garden, with its flowers and herbs. I hope this is Gimlet's cottage; for the very fact of finding such things in preparation may waken in him different tastes from those to which he has been habituated."

"Here's the place, sir," said the groom, riding up and touching his hat, and at the same moment the sound of the horses' feet brought the rosy, curly-headed urchin of the *ci-devant* poacher trotting to the door.

Beauchamp dismounted and went in; and instantly a loud, yelping bark was heard from the other side of the front room, where a terrier dog was tied to the post of a sort of dresser.

By the side of the dog was the figure of the newly constructed gamekeeper himself stooping down and arranging sundry boxes and cages on the ground.

As soon as he heard Beauchamp's step, Ste Gimlet raised himself, and, recognising his visitor, at once a well-pleased smile spread over his face, which the gentleman thought gave great promise for the future. It is something, as this world goes, to be glad to see one from whom we have received a benefit. The opposite emotion is more general, unless we expect new favours ; a fact of which Beauchamp had been made aware by some sad experience, and as the man's pleased look was instantaneous, without a touch of affectation in it, he augured well for some of the feelings of his heart.

"Well, Gimlet!" said the visitor ; "I am happy to see that some of your stock has been saved, even if all your furniture has perished.

"Thank you, sir," replied the other—"my furniture was not worth a groat. I made most of it myself ; but I lost a good many things it

won't be easy to get again. All the dogs that were in the house, but this one, were burned or choked. He broke his cord and got away. All my ferrets too, went, but three that were in the shed ; and the tame badger, poor fellow, I found a bit of his skin this morning. I thank you very much, sir, for what you gave me, and if you wait five minutes you'll see what I've done with it. I think it will give you pleasure, sir ; for I've contrived to get quite enough to set the place out comfortably, and have something over, in case anything is forgotten."

Beauchamp liked the man's way of expressing his gratitude by showing that he appreciated the feelings in which the benefit was conferred. It was worth a thousand hyperboles.

"I shall stay some little time, Gimlet," he said ; "for I have one or two things to talk to you about, if you can spare a minute."

"Certainly, sir," answered the man, in a respectful tone ; "but I can't ask you to sit down, because you see there is no chair."

"Never mind that," replied Beauchamp ; "but what I wished principally to say is this :

my friend, Captain Hayward, takes a good deal of interest in you and in your boy ; and, as he was going to London to-day, he asked me to see you, and tell you, that if you like to let the poor little fellow attend any good school in the neighbourhood, he will pay the expenses. He wished me to point out to you what an advantage it will be to him to have a good education, and also how much better and more safe it is for him to be at school, while you are absent on your duty, than shut up alone in your house."

"Whatever that gentleman wishes, sir, I will do," Gimlet replied. "I never knew one like him before—I wish I had—but, however, I am bound to do what he tells me ; and even if I did not see and know that what he says in this matter is good and right, I would do it all the same. But as for paying, sir, I hope he won't ask me to let him do that, for I have now got quite enough and to spare ; and although I feel it a pleasure to be grateful to such a gentleman, yet he can do good elsewhere with the money."

"You can settle that with him afterwards, Gimlet," replied Mr. Beauchamp, "for he is

coming back in a day or two; but I now want to ask you a question which you must answer or not, as you think fit. You were with Captain Hayward, it seems, when he came up with the man who fired into the window of the hall, and you saw his face, I think?"

Gimlet nodded his head, saying, "I did, sir."

"Do you know the man?" asked Beauchamp, fixing his eyes upon him.

"Yes, sir," replied the other at once, with the colour coming up into his face; "but before you go on, just let me say a word. That person and I were in some sort companions together once, in a matter we had better have let alone, and I should not like to 'peach.'"

"In regard to the attack upon the carriage—to which I know you allude—I am not about to inquire," replied Beauchamp; "but I will ask you only one other question, and I promise you, upon my honour, not to use anything you tell me against the person. Was his name Moreton?"

"I won't tell you a lie, sir," answered Gimlet. "It was, though how you have found it

out I can't guess, for he has been away from this part of the country for many a year."

"It matters not," answered Beauchamp, "how I found it out. I know he has been absent many a year. Can you tell me how long he has returned?"

"That I can't say, I'm sure, sir," replied the man; "but I did hear that he and his lady have been lodging at Buxton's inn for a day or two, but not more. It's a great pity to see how he has gone on, and to sell that fine old place that has been theirs for so many hundred years! I should think, that if one had anything worth having which had been one's father's, one's grandfather's, and one's great grandfather's, for such a long while, it would keep one straight. It's mostly when a man has nothing to pride himself upon that he goes wrong."

"Not always," answered Beauchamp; "unbridled passion, my good friend, youth, inexperience, sometimes accident, lead a man to commit a false step, and that is very difficult to retrieve, in this life."

“Ay, ay, I know that, I know that, sir,” answered Gimlet, “but I hope not impossible;” and he looked up in Beauchamp’s face with an expression of doubt and inquiry.

“By no means impossible,” replied the gentleman, “and the man who has the courage and strength of mind to retrieve a false step, gives a better assurance to society for his future conduct than perhaps a man who has never committed one can do.”

Gimlet looked down, and meditated for a minute or two, and, though he did not distinctly express the subject of his contemplation, his reverie ended with the words, “Well, I will try.” The next moment he added, “I don’t think, however, that this Captain Moreton will ever make much of it; for he has been going on now a long while in the same way, from a boy to a lad, and from a lad to a man. He broke his father’s heart, they say, after having ruined him to pay his debts; but the worst of it all is, he was always trying to make others as bad as himself. He did me no good; for when

I was a boy, and used to go out and carry his game-bag, he put me up to all manner of things, and that was the beginning of my liking to what people call poaching. Then, too, he had a great hand in ruining this young Harry Wittingham. He taught him to gamble and drink, and a great deal more, when he was a mere child, I may say."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Beauchamp; "then the young man is to be pitied more than blamed."

"I don't know, sir—I don't know," answered the gamekeeper; "he's a bad-hearted fellow. He set fire to my cottage, that's clear enough, and he knew the boy was in it, too; but this business of firing in at the window I can't make out at all. I should have thought it had been an accident, if he had not afterwards taken a shot at Captain Hayward."

"I wish to Heaven I could think it was an accident," answered Beauchamp; "but that is out of the question. They say there are thoughts of pulling down the old house, if the place is not sold again very soon. How far is it?"

“ Oh, not three-quarters of a mile from this,” replied the gamekeeper. “ Have you never seen it, sir? It is a fine old place.”

“ Yes, I have seen it in former years,” said Beauchamp. “ Is it in this parish, then ?”

“ Oh, yes, sir, this is the parish church close by. They all lie buried in a vault here, and their monuments are in the aisle ; would you like to see them ? The key is always left in this cottage. There they lie, more than twenty of them—the Moretons, I mean—for you know the man’s father was not a Moreton ; he was a brother of the Lord Viscount Lenham ; but, when he married the heiress he took the name of Moreton, according to her father’s will. His tomb is in there, and I think it runs, ‘ The Honourable Henry John St. Leger Moreton.’ It is a plain enough tomb for such a fine gentleman as he was ; but those of the Moretons are very handsome, with great figures cut in stone as big as life.”

“ I should like to see them,” said Beauchamp, rousing himself from a reverie.

“ That’s easily done,” answered the game-

keeper; "there's a key always here;" and taking one down from a nail driven in the wall, he led the way to a small side door of the church.

Walking on into the building, Beauchamp and his companion passed along, from monument to monument, pausing to read the different inscriptions, the greater part of which were more intelligible to Beauchamp than his companion, as many were written in Latin. At length, they came to a small and very plain tablet of modern erection, which bore the name of the last possessor of the Moreton property; and Beauchamp paused and gazed at it long, with a very sad and gloomy air.

There is always something melancholy in contemplating the final resting-place of the last of a long line. The mind naturally sums up the hopes gone by, the cherished expectations frustrated, the grandeur and the brightness passed away. The picture of many generations in infancy, manhood, decrepitude, with a long train of sports and joys, and pangs and sufferings, rises like a moving pageant to the eye of

imagination ; and the heart draws its own homily from the fate and history of others. But there seemed something more than this in the young gentleman's breast. His countenance was stern, as well as sad ; it expressed a bitter gloom, rather than melancholy ; and, folding his arms upon his chest, with a knitted brow, and teeth hard set together, he gazed upon the tablet in deep silence, till the sound of a step behind him startled him ; and, turning round, he beheld good Doctor Miles slowly pacing up the aisle towards him.

Stephen Gimlet bowed low to the rector, and drew back ; but Beauchamp did not change his place, though he welcomed his reverend friend with a smile.

"I want to speak with you, Stephen," said Doctor Miles, as he approached ; and then turning towards Beauchamp, he added, "How are you, my dear sir ? There are some fine monuments here."

Beauchamp laid his hand upon the clergyman's arm, and pointing to the tablet before him, murmured, in a low voice ; "I have some-

thing to say to you about that, my good friend; I will walk back with you; for I have long intended to talk to you on several subjects which had better not be delayed any longer; I will leave you to speak with this good man here, if you will join me before the cottage."

"Oh, you need not go—you need not go," said Doctor Miles, "I have nothing to say you may not hear. I wanted to tell you, Stephen," he continued, turning to the *ci-devant* poacher "that I have been down to-day to Tarningham, and have seen old Mrs. Lamb and her son William."

"He's a dear good boy, sir," said Stephen Gimlet, gazing in the rector's face, "and he was kind to me, and used to come up and see his poor sister Mary when nobody else would come near her. The poor little fellow, all crooked and deformed as he is, has more heart and soul in him than the whole town of Tarningham."

"There are more good people in Tarningham, and in the world, Stephen, than you know," answered Dr. Miles, with a sharp look;

“you have to learn, my good friend, that there are natural consequences attached to every particular line of conduct; and, as you turn a key in a door, one way to open it, and another way to shut it, so, if your conduct be good, you open men’s hearts towards you; if your conduct be bad, you close them.”

Stephen Gimlet rubbed his finger on his temple, and answered in a somewhat bitter, but by no means insolent tone: “It’s a very hard lock, sir, that of men’s hearts; and when once it’s shut, the bolt gets mighty rusty—at least, so I’ve found it.”

“Stephen! Stephen!” exclaimed the worthy clergyman, raising his finger with a monitory and reproachful gesture, “can you say so—especially to-day?”

“No, sir; no, sir,” cried Stephen Gimlet, eagerly; “I am wrong—I am very wrong; but just then there came across me the recollection of all the hard usage I have had for twelve long years, and how it had driven me from bad to worse—ay! and killed my poor Mary, too; for her father was very hard; and though

he said her marrying me broke his heart, I am sure he broke hers."

"You must not brood upon such things, Gimlet," said Dr. Miles. "It is better, wiser, and more Christian, for every man to think of the share which his own faults have had in shaping his own fate; and, if he do so coolly and dispassionately, he will find much less blame to be attributed to others than he is inclined to believe. But do not let us waste time upon such considerations. I went down to talk to Mrs. Lamb about you and your boy; I told her what Sir John had done for you; and the imminent peril of death which the poor child had fallen into, from being left totally alone, when you are absent. The good old woman—and pray remark, Stephen, I don't call people good, as the world generally does, without thinking them so—was very much affected, and wept a good deal, and in the end she said she was quite ready to come up and keep house for you, and take care of the child while you are away."

The man seemed troubled; for the offer was

one which, in many respects, was pleasant and convenient to him; but there was a bitter remnant of resentment at the opposition which his unfortunate wife's parents had shown to her marriage with himself, and at the obstinacy with which her father had refused all reconciliation, which struggled against better feelings, and checked any reply upon his lips. Dr. Miles, however, was an experienced examiner of the human heart; and, when he saw such ulcerations, he generally knew the remedy, and how to apply it. In this instance, he put all his evil spirits to flight in a moment by awakening a better one, in whose presence they could not stand.

"The only difficulty with poor Mrs. Lamb seemed to be," he said, after watching the man's countenance during a momentary pause, "that she is so poor. She said that you would have enough to do with your money, and that the little she has, which does not amount to four shillings a week, would not pay her part of your housekeeping."

"Oh, if that's all, doctor," cried Stephen

Gimlet, "don't let that stand in the way. My poor Mary's mother shall never want a meal while I can work for it. I'd find her one any how, if I had to go without myself. Besides, you know, I am rich now, and I'll take care to keep all straight, so as not to get poor again. There could not be a greater pleasure to me, I can assure you, sir, than to share whatever I've got with poor Mary's mother, and that dear good boy Bill. Thanks to this kind gentleman, I've got a nice little lot of furniture; and, if the old woman will but bring her bed, we shall do very well, I'll warrant; and the boy will be taken care of, and go to the school; and we'll all lead a different sort of life, and be quite happy, I dare say. No, not quite happy! I can never be quite happy any more, since my poor girl left me: but she is happy, I am sure; and that's one comfort."

"The greatest," said Dr. Miles, whose spirit of philanthropy in a peculiar way was very easily roused; "the greatest, Stephen; and as it is by no means impossible, nor, I will say, improbable, both from the light of natural

reason and many passages of Scripture, that the spirits of the dead are permitted to see the conduct and actions of those they loved on earth, after the long separation has occurred, think what a satisfaction it will be to your poor wife, if she can behold you acting as a son to her mother,—mind, I don't say that such a thing is by any means certain; I only hint that it is not impossible, nor altogether improbable, that such a power may exist in disembodied spirits."

"I am quite sure it does," said Stephen Gimlet, with calm earnestness; "I have seen her many a time sitting by the side of the water under the willow trees, and watching me when I was putting in my night-lines."

"I think you are mistaken, Stephen," said Dr. Miles, shaking his head; "but, at all events, if such a thing be possible, she will now watch you with more satisfaction, when you are supplying her place in affection to her mother."

"I will do my best, sir," said Stephen Gimlet, "if it be only on that account."

“I am sure you will, Stephen,” answered the worthy clergyman; “and so, the first spare moment you have, you had better go down and talk with Mrs. Lamb. Now, Mr. Beauchamp, I am ready.”

CHAPTER XI.

“WELL, well! sit down and cheer yourself, Goody Lamb,” said Stephen Gimlet, after an interval of thirty hours—for I must pass over for the present those other events affecting more important characters in this tale, which filled up the intervening time in the neighbourhood of Tarningham—“let bygones be bygones, as they say in the country where you have lived so much. Here you are, in as comfortable a cottage as any in the country. I have plenty, and to spare; and, forgetting all that’s past and done, I will try to be a son to you and a brother to poor Bill.”

“Thank you, Stephen, thank you,” said the

old woman to whom he spoke — a quiet, resigned-looking person, with fine features, and large dark eyes, undimmed by time, though the hair was as white as snow, the skin exceedingly wrinkled, and the frame, apparently, enfeebled and bowed down with sickness, cares, or years—"I am sure you will do what you can, my poor lad ; but still I cannot help feeling a little odd at having to move again at my time of life. I thought, when I and my poor husband, Davie Lamb, came up here to Tarningham, out of Scotland, it was the last time I should have to change. But we can never tell what may happen to us. I fancied, when I went to Scotland with stiff old Miss Moreton, that I was to be settled there for life. There I married Lamb, and thought it less likely than ever that I should change, when, suddenly, he takes it into his head to come up here, to the place where I was born and brought up, and did not choose at the time to tell me why or wherefore."

"Ay, he was a close, hard man," said Stephen Gimlet; "he was not likely to give

reasons to any one ; he never did to me, but just said two or three words, and flung away."

"He was a kind husband and a kind father," said the widow, "though he said less than most men, I will acknowledge."

"He was not kind to his poor dear girl," muttered Stephen Gimlet, in a tone which rendered his words scarcely audible ; but yet the widow caught, or divined their sense clearly enough ; and she answered :

"Well, Stephen, don't let us talk about it. There are some things that you and I cannot well agree upon ; and it is better not to speak of them. Poor Davie's temper was soured by a great many things. People did not behave as well as they ought ; and, although I found out afterwards that they persuaded him to come here, they did not do for him what they promised."

"That's likely," answered the *ci-devant* poacher, "though I have no occasion to say so, either, for people have done much more for me than they ever promised, and more than I ever expected. See what good Sir John

Slingsby has done, after I have been taking his game for this many a year; and Mr. Beauchamp, too—why, it was a twenty-pound note he gave me, just because he heard that my cottage had been burnt down, and all the things in it destroyed. But it was all owing to Captain Hayward, who began it by saving the dear boy's life, that lies sleeping in t'other room, and spoke well of me—which nobody ever took the trouble to do before—and said I was not so bad as I seemed; and, please God, I'll not give his promise the lie, anyhow."

"God bless him for a good man!" said Widow Lamb; "he is one of the few, Stephen, whose heart and soul are in doing good."

"Ay, that he is," answered the gamekeeper; "but I did not know you knew him, goody."

"No, I do not know much of him," answered the old lady, "but I know he has been very kind to my boy Bill; and before he went off for London, t'other day, had a long talk to him, which is better, to my thinking, than the money he gave him. But who is this Mr. Beauchamp you say is such a kind man, too? I've heard

Bill talk of him, and he tells me the same ; but I can't well make out about him."

"Why, he is a friend of Captain Hayward's," rejoined the gamekeeper ; " he has been staying a long while at the White Hart, and just the same sort of man as the other, though a sadder-looking man, and not so frank and free."

"But what looking man is he?" asked the old woman. "You can tell what a dog's like, or what a ferret's like, Stephen, well enough ; and I should like to hear about him—for I have a curiosity, somehow."

"Why, he is a tall man, and a strong man," answered Stephen Gimlet, "with a good deal of darkish hair, not what one would say curling, but yet not straight, either ; and large eyes, in which you can see little or no white ; very bright and sparkling, too. Then he's somewhat pale and sunburnt, and very plain in his dress, always in dark clothes ; but yet, when one looks at him, one would not like to say a saucy thing to him ; for there is something, I don't know what, in his way and his look, that, though he is as kind as possible when he

speaks, seems to tell everybody, 'I am not an ordinary kind of person.' He never wears any gloves, that I saw ; but, for all that, his hands are as clean as if they had been washed the minute before, and the wristbands of his shirt are as white as snow."

Goody Lamb paused, thoughtfully, and rubbed her forehead once or twice, under the gray hair.

"I have seen him, then," she said at length, in a very peculiar tone ; he has passed my little window more than once. And his name is Beauchamp, is it?"

"So they say," answered Stephen Gimlet, in some surprise ; "why should it not be?"

"Oh ! I don't know," answered the widow, and there she ceased.

"Well, you are very droll to-night, goody," said Stephen Gimlet ; "but I should like a cup of tea before I go out upon my rounds—so I'll just get some sticks to make the fire burn, for that kettle does nothing but simmer."

Thus saying, he went into the little passage, and out into a small yard, whence he brought

a faggot or two. He then laid them on the hot embers, blew up a flame, and made the kettle boil; and, all this time, not a word passed between him and Goody Lamb; for both seemed very busy with thoughts of their own. At length, when a teapot and some cups had been produced, and a small packet of tea, wrapped up in a brown paper, the old lady sat down to prepare the beverage for her son-in-law, as the first act of kindly service she rendered him since she had undertaken to keep his house. To say the truth, it was more for herself than for him that the tea was made; for Stephen Gimlet did not like the infusion, and was not accustomed to it; but he knew the good dame's tastes, and was anxious to make her as comfortable as he could.

While she was making the tea after her own peculiar fashion—and almost every one has a mode of his own—Gimlet stood on the other side of the little deal table, and watched her proceedings. At length he said, somewhat suddenly, “Yes, Mr. Beauchamp was up here yesterday, just when Doctor Miles was talking

to me, and he asked me a great many questions about ——” and here he paused, thinking he might be violating some confidence if he mentioned the subject of his visitor’s inquiries. The next instant, he concluded his sentence in a different way from that which he first intended, saying—“ about a good many things; and then he went into the church with me, and looked at all the tombs of the Moretons, and especially that of the last gentleman.”

“ Ay, well he might,” answered Goody Lamb.

“ Indeed !” exclaimed Stephen Gimlet, with a slight laugh ; “ then you seem to know more of him than I do.”

Goody Lamb nodded her head ; and her son-in-law proceeded with some warmth : “ Then I am sure you know no harm of him !”

“ No, Stephen—no !” she said, “ I do not ! I saw him as a young lad, and I have not seen him since. But I have not forgotten him ; for he came down to my house—what is called the Grieves-house in Scotland—on the morning of a day that turned out the heaviest day of his life ; and he was a gay young lad then ; and

he saw my poor boy, who was then a little fellow of four years old, that all the folks there used to gibe at on account of his misfortunes ; but this gentleman took him on his knee, and patted his head, and was kind to him, and said he was a clever boy, and gave him a couple of shillings to buy himself a little flute, because the poor fellow was fond of music even then, and used to whistle so sweetly, it was enough to break one's heart to hear such sounds come from such a poor body. The gentleman has never thought of me or mine since then, I'll warrant, but I have thought of him often enough—and I'll ask him a question or two some day, please God!"

"The heaviest day in his life!" repeated Stephen Gimlet, who had marked every word she uttered with strong attention ; "how was that, Goody?"

"Ay," answered Widow Lamb, shaking her head, "as they say in that country, it is no good talking of all that ; so ask me no more questions, Stephen, but sit down and take your tea, my man, and then go about your work."

Stephen Gimlet sat down, and, with not the greatest pleasure in the world, took a cup of the beverage she had prepared; but still he was very thoughtful, for there was something in Mr. Beauchamp, even in the grave sadness of his ordinary manner, which created a kind of interest in a man of a peculiarly imaginative character; and he would have given a good deal to know all that Widow Lamb could tell but would not. He did not choose to question her, however; and, after having finished a large slice of brown bread, he rose and unfastened the only dog he had remaining, in order to go out upon his night's round.

Just at that moment, some one tried the latch of the cottage, and then knocked for admission; and the dog, springing forward, growled, barked, and snarled furiously.

The gamekeeper chid him back, and then opened the door, when, to his surprise, he saw the figure of young Harry Wittingham before him. The dog sprang forward again, as if he would have torn the visitor to pieces; and, to say the truth, Stephen Gimlet felt a great in-

clination to let the beast have his way ; but, after a moment's thought, he drove it back again, saying, with a bitter laugh—

“The beast knows the danger of letting you in. What do you want with me, sir ?”

“I want you to do me a great service, Ste,” said Harry Wittingham, with a familiar and friendly air ; “and I am sure you will, if ——”

“No I won't,” answered Stephen Gimlet ; “if it were to save you from hanging, I would not put my foot over that door-step. It is no use talking, Mr. Wittingham ; I will have nothing more to do with any of your tricks. I don't wish ever to see you again ; I'm in a new way of life, and it won't do, I can tell you.”

“Oh, I have heard all about that,” answered the young man, in a light tone ; “and, moreover, that you have taken a silly fancy into your head, that I set fire to your cottage. It is all nonsense, upon my word. Your boy must have done it, playing with the fire that was on the hearth.”

Stephen Gimlet's face turned somewhat pale

with the effort to keep down the anger that was in his heart; but he replied shortly and quickly, for fear it should burst forth.

"The boy had no fire to play with—you knew well he was locked up in the bed-room, and there he was found, when you burned the place down."

"Well, if I had any hand in it," said young Wittingham, "it must have been a mere accident."

"Ay, when you knew there was a poor helpless child in the house," said Stephen Gimlet, bitterly; "it was a sort of accident that well-nigh deserved hanging."

"Nonsense, nonsense, my good fellow!" said the young man; "you are angry about nothing; and though you have got a good place, I dare say you are not the man to refuse a couple of guineas when they are offered to you."

"If you offer them," cried Stephen Gimlet, furiously, "I'll throw them in your face! An accident, indeed! to burn my cottage, and nearly my poor child! I suppose it was by accident that you stopped the carriage in the

lane ? And by accident that you set a man to fire at your own father through the window ?”

“Hush, hush, Stephen,” cried Widow Lamb, catching hold of his coat, and attempting to keep him back, as he took a step towards Harry Wittingham, who turned very pale.

The young man recovered his audacity the next moment, however, and exclaimed—

“Pooh ! let him alone, good woman ; if he thinks to bully me, he is mistaken.”

“Get out of this house,” cried Stephen Gimlet, advancing close to him. “Get out of this house, without another word, or I’ll break your neck !”

“You are a fool,” answered young Wittingham ; “and, if you don’t mind, I’ll send you to Botany Bay.”

The words were scarcely out of his mouth, when Stephen Gimlet aimed a straight blow at him with his right hand, which was immediately parried ; for the young vagabond was not unskilful in the science of defence ; but the next instant, the gamekeeper’s left told with stunning effect in the midst of his face,

and he fell prostrate, with his head out of the doorway and his feet within. Stephen Gimlet looked at him for a moment, then, stooping down, lifted him in his strong arms, pitched him headlong out, and shut the door.

“There !” said Gimlet ;—“now I’ll sit down for a minute and get cool.”

CHAPTER XII.

WE will go back, if it pleases the reader ; for fortunately, it happens that, in a work of this character, one can go back. Oh, how often in human life is it to be wished that we could do the same ! What deeds, done amiss, would then be rectified ! What mistakes in thought, in conduct, in language, would then be corrected ! What evils for the future avoided ! What false steps would be turned back ! What moral bonds, shackling our whole being, would not then be broken ! I do believe that, if any man would take any hour out of any period of his life, and look at it with a calm, impartial, unprejudiced eye, he would feel a longing to

turn back and change something therein: he would wish to say more than he had said—or less—to say it in a different tone—with a different look—or he would have acted differently—he would have yielded—or resisted—or listened—or refused to listen—he would wish to have exerted himself energetically—or to have remained passive—or to have meditated ere he acted—or considered something he had forgotten—or attended to the small, still, voice in his heart, when he had shut his ears. Something, something, he ever would have altered in the past! But, alas! the past is the only reality of life, unchangeable, irretrievable, indestructible; we can neither mould it, nor recall it, nor wipe it out. There it stands for ever: the rock of adamant, up whose steep side we can hew no backward path.

We will turn to where we left Doctor Miles and Beauchamp. Issuing forth from the church, and passing round Stephen Gimlet's cottage, they found the worthy clergyman's little phaeton standing by the two horses which Beauchamp had brought from Tarningham Park.

Orders were given for the four-wheeled and four-footed things to follow slowly; and the two gentlemen walked forward on foot, the younger putting his hand lightly through the arm of the elder, as a man does when he wishes to bespeak attention to what he is going to say.

“I have been looking at those monuments with some interest, my dear doctor,” said Beauchamp, after they had taken about twenty steps in advance; “and now I am going to make you, in some degree, what, I dare say, as a good Protestant divine, you never expected to become—my father-confessor. There are several things upon which I much wish to consult you, as I have great need of a good and fair opinion and advice.”

“The best that it is in my power to give, you shall have, my young friend,” answered Dr. Miles; “not that I expect you to take my advice, either; for I never yet, in the course of a long life, knew above two men who did take advice when it was given. But that is not always the fault of the giver; and therefore,

mine is ever ready, when it is asked. What is it you have to say?"

"More, I fear, than can be well said in one conversation," answered Beauchamp; "but I had better begin and tell a part, premising, that it is under the seal of confession, and therefore——"

"Shall be as much your own secret, as if it had not been given to me," said Doctor Miles. "Go on."

"Well, then, for one part of the story," said Beauchamp, with a smile at his old companion's abruptness; "in the first place, my dear doctor, I am, in some sort, an impostor; and our mutual friend, Stanhope, has aided the cheat."

Doctor Miles turned round sharply, and looked in his face for a moment; then nodded his head, as he saw there was no appearance of shame in the expression, and gazed straightforward again, without saying a word.

"To make the matter short, my good friend," continued his companion, "my name is not

Beauchamp at all, nor anything the least like it."

"*Nom de guerre*," said Doctor Miles; "pray, what may the war be about?"

"Of that hereafter," said Beauchamp—"for I shall still continue to call him by the name which he repudiated. "You have seen that I have been somewhat anxious to purchase this Moreton Hall property, and, I am still anxious to do so, though I have received a little bit of news on that subject to-day which may make me very cautious about the examination of titles, &c. This intelligence is, that the ostensible proprietor is not the real one; your acquaintance, Mr. Wharton, having become virtually possessed of the property, perhaps, by not the fairest means."

"Humph!" said Doctor Miles; but he added nothing further, and Beauchamp went on.

"Poor Mr. St. Leger Moreton," he said, "was by no means a man of business,—an easy, kind-hearted, somewhat too sensitive person."

"I know, I know!" answered Doctor Miles,

“ I was well acquainted with him; and if ever man died of a broken heart, which is by no means so unusual an occurrence as people suppose, he did so.”

“ I believe it,” answered Beauchamp; “ but at all events, he was not a man, as you must know, to ascertain that he was dealt fairly by. His son, I am sorry to say, was willing to do anything for ready money—I say anything, for I do not know that act to which he would not have recourse for any object that he sought to gain.”

“ You seem to know them all thoroughly,” said Doctor Miles, drily; and he then added, in a warmer tone, “ I will tell you what, my dear sir, this Captain Moreton is one of those men who make us ashamed of human nature. Born to a fine estate, the son of an excellent woman and amiable man, though a weak one, he went on corrupting himself and every one else, from boyhood to youth, and from youth to manhood. He is the only man I have ever known without one principle of any kind, or one redeeming point. There is but one thing

to be said in his excuse—namely, that his great aunt, old Miss Moreton, who went to Scotland, and left him a small property there of about a thousand a year, which he dissipated totally in eleven weeks after he got it, spoiled him from his infancy—pampered, indulged, encouraged him in the most frightful manner. Even his vices became virtues in her eyes; so that there is not much marvel that he became a gambler, a *débauchée*, a duellist, and a scoundrel. People may consider that his courage and his talents were redeeming qualities, but I look upon them as none. They were only energies, which carried him on to deeper wickedness and infamy. He is now, I believe, a common sharper and swindler.”

“I have let you go on, doctor,” said Beauchamp, “because you have not said one word that is not just; but yet I must tell you, that this gentleman is my first-cousin, and, unfortunately, heir to my estates and name.”

Doctor Miles halted suddenly, and looked at his companion with some surprise.

“This takes me unprepared,” he said; “I

never heard of his having more than one cousin—namely, the present Lord Lenham; and he, I understood, was travelling in India, for pleasure—a curious place to go for pleasure—but all men have their whims.”

“It was not exactly a whim that led me thither, my dear doctor,” said Beauchamp; “from the time I was twenty-one years of age up to the present hour, I have been a wanderer over the face of the earth, expiating in bitterness of heart one early error. I have not time now, and, I may say also, I have not spirits at the present moment to enter into the long detail of my past history. Let it suffice for the present to say, that a species of persecution, very difficult to avoid or bear, made me for many years a stranger to my native country. I visited every part of Europe and America, and then thought I would travel in the East, visiting scenes full of interest both from their novelty, in some respects, and from the vast antiquity to which their history and many of their monuments go back. As I found that all my movements were watched for the purpose

of subjecting me to annoyance, I thought my residence in India a favourable opportunity for dropping my title and assuming another name, and have ever since gone by that of Beauchamp. During these wanderings my income has far exceeded my expenditure; a large sum of money has accumulated, and, on my return to England, I was advised to invest it in land. My attention was first directed to this estate, which I am desirous of purchasing, by finding a letter at my agents' from my cousin, Captain Moreton, expressing great penitence for all that had passed, professing a desire to retrieve his errors, lamenting the loss of the family property, and asking for a loan of five thousand pounds.

"I hope you did not give it him," cried Doctor Miles. "His penitence is all feigned; his reformation false; the money would go at the gambling table in a week. I am not uncharitable in saying so, for I have had the opportunity of ascertaining, within this month, that the man is the same as ever."

"So I found on making inquiries," rejoined

Beauchamp, "and consequently I refused decidedly. This refusal brought a most insolent and abusive letter, of which I took no notice; but having received intimation that the man is married, I made up my mind to the following course: to purchase this property, and if he have any children, to make it the condition of my giving him pecuniary assistance, that he shall give up one of them to be educated entirely by myself. Having ensured that all shall be done to make that child a worthy member of society, I would settle the Moreton estate upon it; and thus, at all events, leave one of my name in a situation to do honour to it."

"A kind plan, and a good one," said Doctor Miles; "but yet people will call it a whimsical one, and wonder that you do not marry, and transmit your property and name to children of your own."

A bright and cheerful smile came upon Beauchamp's face.

"Hitherto, my dear doctor," he said, "that has been impossible. The obstacles, however, are now removed—at least, I believe so;

and perhaps some day I may follow the course you suggest; but that will make no difference in regard to my intention. If I have children of my own, they will have more than enough for happiness, and having conceived a scheme of this kind, I never like to abandon it. I will, therefore, purchase this property, if it can be ascertained that Mr. Wharton's title is perfectly clear; but perhaps you, as the clergyman of two parishes here, can obtain proofs for me, that all the collateral heirs to the estate, under the entail made by Sir Charles Moreton, are extinct beyond all doubt. Under those circumstances, the sale by my uncle and his son would be valid."

"Wharton would not have bought it unless he was sure," said Doctor Miles.

"The sum actually paid was very small," replied Beauchamp, in a peculiar tone—"all the rest went to cover a debt, real or pretended, of Mr. Wharton's own. But here we are at the gates of the park, and so I must bring our conference to an end. To-morrow, or the next day I will tell you more of my personal history,

for there are other subjects on which I must consult you. Do you know who this is riding up so fast?"

"A fool," said Doctor Miles; and almost as he spoke, a young, fresh-coloured man, dressed in a green coat and leather breeches, and mounted on a splendid horse, with a servant behind him, cantered up, and sprang to the ground.

"I don't know—ah—whether I have the honour of speaking to Mr. Beauchamp—ah?" he said, in a self-sufficient tone.

Beauchamp bowed his head, saying, "The same, sir."

"Then, sir—ah—my name is Granty—ah—and you see—ah—I have been referred to you—ah—as the friend of a certain Captain Hayward—ah—in reference to a little affair—ah—between him and my friend Harry Wittingham—ah—whom he threatened to horsewhip—ah."

"If he threatened," answered Beauchamp, in a calm tone, "he is a very likely man to fulfil his words—but I think, sir, we had better speak upon this subject alone, as Captain Hay-

ward has put me in possession of his views. This is my friend, Doctor Miles—a clergyman.”

“ Oh, yes, I know Doctor Miles—ah,” said Mr. Granty; “ a very good fellow, aren’t you, Miles—ah?”

“ No, sir, I am not,” answered Doctor Miles; “ but now, Mr. Beauchamp, I will leave you, as you seem to have some pleasant conversation before you;” and shaking Mr. Beauchamp by the hand without any further apparent notice of what he had heard, Doctor Miles walked to the side of his carriage and got in, honouring Mr. Granty with the sort of cold, stiff bow that a poker might be supposed to make if it were taught to dance a minuet. But Doctor Miles had noticed all that had passed, and did not forget it.

And now, dear reader, we will put our horses into a quicker pace, leap over all the further conversation between Mr. Beauchamp and Mr. Granty, and also an intervening space of three days, merely premising that during that period, from a great number of knots on the tangled string of events, neither Mary Clifford nor Isa-

bella Slingsby had any opportunity of speaking to Mr. Beauchamp for more than two minutes in private. Those two minutes were employed by Miss Clifford, to whose lot they fell, in telling him, with a hesitating and varying colour, that she very much wished for a short conversation with him. Beauchamp was surprised, but he answered with courtesy and kindness, and wished her to proceed at once. Sir John Slingsby was upon them the next moment, however, and the matter was deferred.

Thus went the three days I have mentioned, but on the morning of the fourth, just about half-past five, when everybody but skylarks are supposed to be asleep, Beauchamp and our friend Ned Hayward entered the small meadow, just under the trees by the palings of Tarningham Park, on the side next to Tarningham, near the spot where the river issued forth into the field on its onward progress. They were followed by a man, carrying a mahogany case, bound with brass, and a gentleman in a black coat, with a surgical air about him; for, strange, human nature seldom goes

out to make a hole in another piece of human nature, without taking precautions for mending it as soon as made.

Beauchamp took out his watch, and satisfied himself that they were to their time, spoke a few words to the surgeon, unlocked the mahogany box, looked at some of the things it contained, and then walked up and down the field with Ned Hayward for a quarter of an hour.

"This is too bad, Hayward," he said, at length; "I think we might very well now retire."

"No, no," said Hayward; "give him law enough, one can never tell what may stop a man. He shall have another quarter of an hour. Then, if he does not come, he shall have the horsewhipping."

Ten minutes more passed, and then two other gentlemen entered the field, with a follower, coming up at a quick pace, and with heated brows.

"Beg pardon, gentlemen—ah," said Mr. Granty, advancing; "but we have had the devil's own work—ah—to get the tools—ah.

My friend Wittingham was knocked down by a fellow—ah—that he was sending for cash, so that I had to furnish—ahem.”

“Never mind all this,” said Beauchamp ; “you are now here, though you have kept my friend waiting. We had better proceed to business at once, as I have had a hint that, from a slight indiscretion on your part, sir, in mentioning this matter before a clergyman, inquiries have been made which may produce inconvenient results.”

Mr. Granty was somewhat nettled ; but neither Beauchamp nor Hayward attended to any of his “ahs ;” the ground was measured, the pistols loaded, the two gentlemen placed on their ground, and then came the unpleasant “one—two—three.” Both fired instantly, and the next moment Harry Wittingham reeled and dropped. Beauchamp thought he saw Ned Hayward waver slightly, more as if the pistol had recoiled violently in his hand than anything else ; but, as soon as his antagonist fell, the young officer ran up to him, stooped, and raised his head.

The surgeon came up directly, and opened the wounded man's coat and waistcoat, as he lay with his face as pale as ashes. At the same moment, however, there was a cry of "Hie, hie!" and, turning round, Beauchamp saw the poor little pot-boy, Billy Lamb, scampering across the field as hard as he could go.

"Run, run!" cried the boy; "there are the magistrates and the constables all coming up—run over by the stile there; I brought the chaise to the end of the lane."

"I can't go," said Ned Hayward, "till I hear what is to come of this."

"You had better go," said the surgeon, looking up; "it does not seem to me to be dangerous, but you may get into prison if you stay. No, it has shattered the rib, but passed round. He will do well, I think. Run, run!—I can see the people coming."

Beauchamp took Ned Hayward's arm, and drew him away. In two minutes they had reached the chaise and were rolling on; but then Ned Hayward leaned back somewhat languidly, and said—

“I wish, Beauchamp, you would just tie your handkerchief tight round my shoulder here, for it is bleeding more than I thought, and I feel sickish.”

“Good Heavens! are you hurt?” exclaimed Beauchamp, and, opening his waistcoat, he saw that the whole right side of his shirt was steeped in blood.

CHAPTER XIII.

I do believe, from my very heart and soul, that there is not the slightest possible good in attempting to write a book regularly. I say with prime ministers and maid-servants, with philosophers and fools, "I've tried it, and surely I ought to know." It may be objected that the result entirely depends upon the way in which a thing is tried, and that a very simple experiment would fail or might fail in the hands of a fool or a maid-servant, which would succeed in those of a prime minister or a philosopher. Nevertheless, it is true that critics make rules which life will not conform to. Art says one

thing, nature another; and, in such a case, a fig for art!

“Do not be continually changing the scene,” says the critic; “do not run from character to character; introduce no personage who does not tend to bring about some result;” but in the course of human events the scene is always shifting; the characters which pass before our eyes, cross and return at every instant, and innumerable personages flit before us like shadows over a glass, leaving no trace of their having been. Others, indeed, appear for an instant, not only on the limited stage of domestic life, but often on the great scene of the world, act their appointed part, produce some particular effect, and then, like those strange visitants of our system, the comets, rush back into the depths, from which they emerged but for an hour.

All this has been written to prove that it is perfectly right and judicious that I should introduce my beloved reader into the study of Mr. Wharton, or rather Abraham Wharton, Esq., solicitor, and attorney-at-law, somewhere about

a fortnight after the duel between Captain Hayward and young Wittingham. Mr. Wharton was a small, spare, narrow man, of a tolerably gentlemanlike figure; and, to look at his back, one of those prepossessions which lead us all by the nose, made one believe that his face must be a thin, sharp, fox-like face, probably with a dark black beard, closely shaved, making the muzzle look blue.

On getting round in front, however, the surprise of the new acquaintance was great to see a red and blotchy countenance, with sharp, black eyes, and very little beard at all. There was generally a sweet simper upon his lips, intended to be courteous, but that simper, like an exchequer bill, was very easily convertible, and a poor client, an inferior solicitor on the opposite side, or an unready debtor, soon found that it would be changed into heavy frowns or sarcastic grins.

Mr. Wharton was very proper and accurate in his dress. His coat was always black—even when he went out to hunt, which was not a rare occurrence, he never sported the red jacket.

In riding he would occasionally indulge in leather, elsewhere than from the knee downwards; but the habiliment of the lower man was, upon all ordinary occasions, a pair of dark grey pantaloons. He was now so habited in his study, as he called the room behind that where seven clerks were seated, for the business he was engaged in was one in the ordinary course, though of extraordinary interest to Mr. Wharton. It was, in short, the consummation of plucking a poor bird which had been entrapped long before. Now, it was not intended to leave him a feather, and yet Mr. Wharton was inclined to do the thing as decorously as possible. By decorously, I do not mean tenderly—such an unnecessary delicacy never entered into Mr. Wharton's head. The decorum that he thought of was merely *the seeming in the world's eyes*, as a great deal of other decorum is, both male and female. He was about to be as hard, as relentless, as iron-hearted as a cannon ball, but all with infinite professions of kindness and good feeling, and sorrow for the painful necessity, &c. &c. &c., for Mr. Wharton

followed Dr. Kitchener's barbarous recipe for devouring oysters, and "tickled his little favourites before he ate them."

The lawyer was standing at a table with some papers before him—not too many—for he was not like those bankrupt attorneys of the capital, who fill their rooms with brown tin cases, marked in large white letters "House of Lords." He preferred as little show of business as possible. His object now-a-days was, not to get practice, but to make money. Practice enough he had—too much for the common weal.

A clerk—a sort of private secretary, indeed—was sitting at the other end of the table, and the two had discussed one or two less important affairs, affecting a few hundred pounds, when Mr. Wharton at length observed, 'I think, to-morrow is the last day with Sir John Slingsby, Mr. Pilkington, is it not?'

He knew quite well that it was; but, it would seem, he wished to hear his clerk's opinion upon the subject.

"Yes, sir," answered Mr. Pilkington; "I don't see a chance for him."

“Nor I either,” answered Mr. Wharton; “I am afraid he is quite run out, poor man. The six months’ notice of foreclosure was all right, and the interest now amounts to a large sum.”

“A very large sum indeed, sir, with the costs,” answered Mr. Pilkington; “you don’t think, sir, he’ll attempt to revise the costs or haggle about the interest?”

“He can’t, Mr. Pilkington,” replied Mr. Wharton, drily; “the costs are all secured by bond and accounts passed, and it was a client of mine who advanced him the money at seven-and-a-half, to pay the interest every six months on my mortgage. I had nothing to do with the transaction.”

Mr. Pilkington smiled, and Mr. Wharton proceeded.

“Why, you know quite well, Pilkington, that it was Dyer who advanced the money, and his bankruptcy brought the bonds into my hands.”

“I thought there was only one bond, sir,” answered Mr. Pilkington; “you told me to have a fresh bond every six months for the running interest and the arrears, and the inte-

rest upon former advances, to guard against loss."

Mr. Wharton now smiled and nodded his head, saying, for he was vain of his shrewdness, and vanity is a weak passion, "True, true, Pilkington, but last half-year I saw that things were coming to a close, and therefore thought it better to have two bonds. It looks more regular, though the other is the most convenient mode."

"And, besides, it secures the interest on the last half-year's interest," said Pilkington; but to this observation Mr. Wharton made no reply, turning to another part of the same subject.

"Just bid Raymond to step down to Mr. Wittingham's," said the lawyer; "and tell him, with my compliments, I should be glad to speak with him for a minute. I must give him a hint of what is going on."

"Why, sir," said Mr. Pilkington, hesitating, "you know he has a bond too, out on the same day, and he'll be sure to go before you."

"I know, I know," answered Mr. Wharton, but I should like him to be the first, Pilkington."

“Will there be enough to cover all?” asked the clerk, doubtfully.

“Ample,” answered his great man; “besides, the whole sum coming thundering down at once will ensure that no one will be fool enough to help. I have heard, indeed, something about a friend who would advance money to pay Wittingham’s bond.”

“Let him!—all the better, that cannot supersede my debt. Wittingham will get his money, and Sir John won’t easily find much more on any security he has to offer. Besides, when some one begins, it gives the very best reason for others going on, and Wittingham won’t be slow, depend upon it. Tell Mr. Raymond to fetch him.”

The clerk retired, not venturing to urge any more objections; but when he returned again, Mr. Wharton himself continued the conversation thus—

“Wittingham is a curious person to deal with; one does not always know what can be his objects.”

Mr. Wharton had always an object himself,

and therefore he fancied that no man could act without one. He never took the impulse of passion, or the misdirection of folly, or the pig-headedness of obstinacy, into account. However, with Mr. Wittingham he was in some degree right, as to his generally having an object; but he was in some degree wrong also, for all the other causes of human wrong-going, passion, folly, and pig-headedness, had their share in the modes, methods, and contrivances, by which the worthy magistrate sought his ends.

“Now, what can be the meaning,” continued Mr. Wharton, “of his opposing so strongly all steps against this Mr. Beauchamp and that Captain Hayward, who were engaged in the duel with his son?”

“They say he had quarrelled with Harry Wittingham, and disinherited him,” replied the clerk; “and old Mrs. Billiter, the housekeeper, is quite furious about it. She declares that it is all old Wittingham’s fault; that if it had not been for him, nothing of the kind would have happened; and that he murdered the young

man. I do not know what it all means ; but they say she will nurse Harry Wittingham through it after all."

Mr. Wharton mused for a minute or two, and then said,

"You do not mean he is out of danger?"

"Oh dear, no, sir!" answered Mr. Pilkington, who perceived a slightly dissatisfied twang in his superior's question ; "Mr. Slattery, the surgeon, said he might sink at any time for the next ten days."

"Humph," said Mr. Wharton, "that is all right! It will keep the others out of the way for some time to come ; and a very good thing, too, for Mr. Beauchamp himself. He it is who is treating for the Moreton Hall estate ; there is a little hitch in the business, which will be soon removed ; but he seems to me just the sort of man who would take Sir John Slingsby's mortgage as an investment, as soon as the other. At all events, he might create difficulties in a business which had better be settled as soon as possible, for all parties, and might burn his own fingers, poor man, into the bar-

gain. You had the bills posted up, Pilkington?"

"Oh yes, sir," replied the clerk, "for twenty miles round, offering a reward. There is no fear, sir. They are safe enough—most likely in France by this time."

Mr. Wharton seemed satisfied; and, after a few minutes, worthy Mr. Wittingham entered the office, and was thence ushered into the study; but, alas! it was no longer the Mr. Wittingham of former days. The somewhat fresh complexion—the stiff, consequential carriage—the vulgar swagger, were all gone; and Mr. Wittingham looked a very sick old gentleman, indeed; weak in the knees, bent in the back, and sallow in the face. The wig was ill-adjusted, the Melton coat a world too wide; you could have put a finger between the knee-bands of the breeches and the stockings; and the top-boots slipped down almost to the ancles. It was marvellous how one who had been so tall and thin before, could have become, to the eye, so much taller and thinner. The great Prince of Parma wrote despatches, reviewed

troops, and conducted a negotiation, within one hour before a long and lingering malady terminated in death. He knew he was dying, and yet went through all his ordinary business, as if he had only to dress and go out to a party instead of into his grave. This was a wonderful instance of the persistence of character under bodily infirmity, or rather, of its triumph over corporeal decay. But that of Mr. Wittingham was more remarkable. The external Wittingham was wofully changed: his oldest friend would not have known him; but the internal Wittingham was still the same; there was not a tittle of difference. He was not in the least softened, he was not in the least brightened: his was one of those granite natures, hard to cut, and impossible to polish. Although he had very little of the diamond in him, yet, as the diamond can only be shaped by the powder of the diamond, nothing but Wittingham could touch Wittingham. His own selfishness was the only means by which he was accessible.

“ Ah, Mr. Wharton,” he said, “ you sent for

me; what is in the wind, now? Not about these two young men any more, I trust? That account is closed. I will have nothing to do with it. Henry Wittingham called out this Captain Hayward; Captain Hayward was fool enough to go out with Henry Wittingham. They each had a shot, and the balance struck was a pistol-ball against Henry Wittingham. Perhaps, if all the items had been reckoned, the account might have been heavier, but I am not going to open the books again. I should not find anything to the credit of my son, depend upon it."

"Oh no, my good friend," said Mr. Wharton, in the most amiable tone possible; "I knew the subject was disagreeable to you, and therefore never returned to the business again. The other magistrates did what they thought their duty required, in offering a reward, &c., but as you had a delicacy in meddling where your son was concerned, the matter was not pressed upon you."

"Delicacy! fiddlesticks' ends!" retorted Mr. Wittingham. "I never had a delicacy in my

life!—I did not choose! That is the proper word. But if it was not about this, why did you send for me?”

“Why, my dear sir,” said Mr. Wharton, “I thought it due in honour to give you a hint—as I know you are a large creditor of Sir John Slingsby—that matters are not going altogether well there.”

“I have known that these six years,” answered the magistrate. “Honour, indeed! You have a great deal to do with honour, and delicacy, and all that; but I am a man of business, and look to things as matters of business. Speak more plainly, Wharton; what is there going worse than usual at the Park? Does he want to borrow more money?”

“He did a fortnight ago, and could not get it,” replied Mr. Wharton, drily; for the most impudent rogue in the world does not like to feel himself thoroughly understood. “But the short and the long of the matter is this, my good sir:—Sir John can go on no longer. Six months’ notice of foreclosure is out to-morrow; other steps must be taken immediately; large

arrears of interest are due ; two or three bonds with judgment are hanging over our poor friend ; and you had better look after yourself."

" Well, well, there is time enough yet," said Mr. Wittingham, in a much less business-like tone than Mr. Wharton expected ; " the preliminaries of the law are somewhat lengthy, Mr. Wharton ? *fi-fas* and *ca-sas* take some time ; and I will think of the matter."

" As you please, my good friend," answered Wharton ; " only just let me hint, that all the preliminaries have been already gone through. An execution will be put in early to-morrow ; there are a good many creditors, and there may be a sort of a scramble, as the school-boys have it, where the quickest runner gets the biggest nut. I thought it but kind and fair to tell you, as a neighbour and a friend, especially as your debt is no trifle, I think."

" An execution early to-morrow !" exclaimed Mr. Wittingham ; " won't the estate pay all ?"

" About two-thirds, I imagine," said Wharton, telling, as was his wont, a great lie with the coolest face possible.

“And what will Sir John do?” said the magistrate, “and poor Miss Slingsby?”

“I am afraid we must touch Sir John’s person,” replied the lawyer, with a sneer; “and as to poor Miss Slingsby, I see nothing for it, but that she should go out as a governess. But do not let us talk nonsense, Wittingham. You are a man of sense and of business. I have given you a caution, and you will act upon it. That is all I have to do with the matter.”

To Mr. Wharton’s surprise, however, he did not find Mr. Wittingham so ready to act in the way he hinted as had been anticipated. The old gentleman hesitated, and doubted, and seemed so uneasy that the solicitor began to fear he had mistaken his character totally, to apprehend that, after all, he might be a kind-hearted, benevolent old gentleman. The reader, however, who has duly remarked the conversation between the magistrate on his sick-bed, and worthy Dr. Miles, may, perhaps, perceive other causes for Mr. Wittingham’s hesitation. He had found that Sir John Slingsby possessed a secret which might hang

his son. Now, although I do not mean at all to say that Mr. Wittingham wished his son to die, in any way, or that he would not have been somewhat sorry for his death, by any means, yet he would have much preferred that the means were not those of strangulation. To have his son hanged, would be to have his own consideration hanged. In short, he did not at all wish to be the father of a man who had been hanged; and consequently, he was somewhat afraid of driving Sir John Slingsby into a corner. But each man, as Pope well knew, has some ruling passion, which is strong even in death. Sir John Slingsby owed Mr. Wittingham five thousand pounds; and Mr. Wittingham could not forget that fact. As he thought of it, it increased, swelled out, grew heavy, like a nightmare. To lose five thousand pounds at one blow! What was any other consideration to that? What was the whole Newgate Calendar, arranged as a genealogical tree and appended to his name either as ancestry or posterity? Nothing, nothing! Dust in the balance! A feather in an air-pump!

Mr. Wittingham grew exceedingly civil to his kind friend, Mr. Wharton; he compassionated poor Sir John Slingsby very much; he was sorry for Miss Slingsby; but he did not in the least see why, when other people were about to help themselves, he should not have his just right. He chatted over the matter with Mr. Wharton, and obtained an opinion from him, without a fee, as to the best mode of proceeding—and Mr. Wharton's opinions on such points were very sound; but in this case particularly careful. Then Mr. Wittingham went home, sent for his worthy solicitor, Mr. Bacon, whom he had employed for many years, as cheaper and safer than Mr. Wharton, and gave him instructions, which set the poor little attorney's hair on end.

Mr. Bacon knew Mr. Wittingham, however; he had been accustomed to manage him at petty sessions; and he was well aware that it was necessary to set Mr. Wittingham in opposition to Mr. Wittingham, before he could hope that any one's opinion would be listened to. When those two respectable persons had

a dispute together, there was some chance of a third being attended to who stepped in as an umpire.

But, in the present case, Mr. Bacon was mistaken. He did not say one word of the pity, and the shame, and the disgrace of taking Sir John Slingsby quite by surprise ; but he started various legal difficulties, and, indeed, some formidable obstacles to the very summary proceedings which Mr. Wittingham contemplated. But that gentleman was as a gun loaded with excellent powder and well-crammed down shot, by Mr. Wharton ; and the priming was dry and fresh. Mr. Bacon's difficulties were swept away in a moment ; his obstacles leaped over ; and the solicitor was astonished at the amount of technical knowledge which his client had obtained in a few hours.

There was nothing to be done but obey. Mr. Wittingham was too good a card to throw out : Sir John Slingsby was evidently ruined beyond redemption ; and, with a sorrowful heart—for Mr. Bacon was, at bottom, a kind

and well-disposed man—he took his way to his office with his eyes roaming from one side of the street to the other, as if he were looking for some means of escaping from a disagreeable task. As they thus roamed, they fell upon Billy Lamb, the little deformed pot-boy, The lawyer eyed him for a minute or so as he walked along, compared him in imagination with one of his own clerks, a tall, handsome looking fellow, with a simpering face ; thought that Billy would do best, though he was much more like a wet capon than a human being, and beckoning the boy into his office, retired with him into an inner room, where Mr. Bacon proceeded so cautiously and diffidently, that, had not Billy Lamb's wits been as sharp as his face, he would have been puzzled to know what the solicitor wanted him to do.

CHAPTER XIV.

It was a dark, cold, cheerless night, though the season was summer, and the preceding week had been very warm—one of those nights when a cold cutting north-east wind has suddenly broken through the sweet dream of bright days, and checked the blood in the trees and plants, withering them with the presage of winter. From noon till eventide that wind had blown; and although it had died away towards night, it had left the sky dark and the air chilly. Not a star was to be seen in the expanse above; and, though the moon was up, yet the light she gave only served to show that heavy clouds were floating over the

heavens, the rounded edges of the vapours becoming every now and then of a dim white, without the face of the bright orb ever being visible for a moment. A dull, damp mist hung about the ground, and a faint smell, not altogether unpleasant, but sickly and oppressive, rose up, resembling that which is given forth by some kinds of water plants, and burdened the cold air.

In the little churchyard, at the back of Stephen Gimlet's cottage, there was a light burning, though ten o'clock had struck some quarter of an hour before; and an elderly man, dressed, notwithstanding the chilliness of the night, merely in a waistcoat with striped sleeves, might be seen by that light, which was nested in a horse-lantern, and perched upon a fresh-turned heap of earth. His head and shoulders were above the ground; and part of his rounded back, with ever and anon the rise and fall of a heavy pick-axe, appeared amongst the nettles and long hemlocks which overrun the churchyard. His legs and feet

were buried in a pit which he was digging, and busily the sexton laboured away to hollow out the grave, muttering to himself from time to time, and sometimes even singing at his gloomy work. He was an old man, but he had no one to help him, and in truth he needed it not, for he was hale and hearty, and he put such a good will to his task, that it went on rapidly. The digging of a grave was to him a sort of festival. He held brotherhood with the worm, and gladly prepared the board for his kindred's banquet.

The grave-digger had gone on for some time, when, about the hour I have mentioned, some one paused at the side of the low mossy wall, about a hundred yards from the cottage of the new gamekeeper, and looked over towards the lantern. Whoever the visitor was, he seemed either to hesitate or to consider, for he remained with his arms leaning on the coping for fully five minutes before he opened the little wooden gate close by, and walking in, went up to the side of the grave. The sexton

heard him well enough, but I never saw a sexton who was not a humorist, and he took not the least notice, working away as before.

“Why, what are you about, old gentleman?” said a man’s voice, at length.

“Don’t you see?” rejoined the sexton, looking up; “practising the oldest trade in the world but one—digging, to be sure—ay, and grave-digging, too, which is a very ancient profession, likewise, though when first it began men lived so long, the sextons must have been but poor craftsmen for want of practice.”

“And whose grave is it you are digging?” asked the visitor. “I have been here some days, and have not heard of any deaths.”

“One would think you were a doctor,” answered the sexton, “for you seem to fancy that you must have a hand in every death in the parish—but you want to know whose grave it is—well, I can’t tell you, for I don’t know myself.”

“But who ordered you to dig it, then?” demanded the stranger.

“No one,” said the sexton; “it will fit some-

body, I warrant, and I shall get paid for it; and why should not I keep a ready-made grave, as a town cobbler keeps ready-made shoes? I am digging it out of my own fancy. There will be death somewhere before the week is out, I am sure; for I dreamed last night that I saw a wedding come to this church, and the bride and the bridegroom stepped on each of the grave hillocks as they walked—so there will be a death, that's certain, and may be two."

"And so you are digging the grave on speculation, old fellow?" exclaimed the other; "but I dare say you have a shrewd guess whom it is for. There is some poor fellow ill in the neighbourhood—or some woman in a bad way, ha?"

"It may be for the young man lying wounded up at Buxton's inn," answered the sexton; "they say he is better; but I should not wonder if it served his turn after all. But I don't know, there is never any telling who may go next. I've seen funny things in my day. Those who thought they had a long lease, find

it was a short one: those who were wishing for other people's death, that they might get their money, die first themselves."

The sexton paused, and the stranger did not make any answer, looking gloomily down into the pit, as if he did not much like the last reflections that rose up from the bottom of the grave.

"Ay, funny things enough I have seen," continued the sexton, after giving a stroke or two with his pickaxe; "but the funniest of all is, to see how folks take on at first for those who are gone, and how soon they get over it. Lord, what a lot of tears I have seen shed on this little bit of ground! and how soon they were dried up, like a shower in the sunshine. I recollect now there was a young lady sent down here for change of air by the London doctors, after they had poisoned her with their stuff, I dare say. A pretty creature she was as ever I set eyes on, and did not seem ill, only a bit of a cough. Her mother came with her, and then her lover, who was to be married to her when she got well. But at six months'

end she died—there she lies, close on your left—and her lover, wasn't he terrible down-cast? and he said to me when we had put her comfortably in the ground, 'I shan't be long after, sexton; keep me that place beside her—there's a guinea for you.' He did not come back, however, for five years, and then I saw him one day go along the road in a chaise and four, with a fine lady by his side, as gay as a lark."

"Well, you would not have the man go on whimpering all his life?" said the other. "How old are you, sexton?"

"Sixty and eight last January," answered the other, "and I have dug these graves forty years come St. John."

"Have you many old men in the parish?" asked the stranger.

"The oldest is eighty-two," replied the sexton, "and she is a woman."

"Six from eighty-two," said the stranger, in a contemplative tone, "that leaves seventy-six. That will do very well."

"Will it?" said the sexton; "well, you know

best; but I should like to see a bit more of your face," and as he spoke, the old man suddenly raised his lantern towards the stranger, and then burst out into a laugh—"ay, I thought I knew the voice!" he said; "and so you've come back again, Captain? Well, now, this is droll enough! That bone you've got your foot upon belongs to your old wet-nurse, Sally Loames, if I know this ground; and she had as great a hand in damaging you as any of the rest. She was a bad one! But what has brought you down, now that all the money's gone, and the property, too?"

"Why, I'll tell you," answered Captain Moreton, "I'll tell you, my good old Grindley. I want to see into the vault where the coffins are, and just to have a look at the register. Can't you help me? You used always to have the keys."

"No, no, Captain," rejoined the sexton, shaking his head; "no tricks! no tricks! I'm not going to put my head into a noose for nothing."

"Nobody wants you to put your head in a

noose, Grindley;" answered the other, "all I want is just to take a look at the coffins for a minute, and another at the register, for I have had a hint that I have been terribly cheated, and that people have put my great-grandfather's death six years too early, which makes all the difference to me; for if my mother was born while he was living, she could not break the entail, do you see?"

"Well, then," said the sexton, "you can come to-morrow, Captain; and I'll tell the Doctor any hour you like."

"That won't do, Grindley," replied Moreton, "the parson is with the enemy; and, besides, I must not let anybody know that I have seen the register and the coffins, till I have everything prepared to upset their roguery. You would not have me lose my own, would you, old boy? Then as to your doing it for nothing, if you will swear not to tell that I have seen the things at all, till I am ready and give you leave, you shall have a ten-pound note."

It is a strange and terrible thing, that the

value of that which has no value at all, except as it affects us in this world and this life, increases enormously in our sight as we are leaving them. The sexton had always been more or less a covetous man, as Captain Moreton well knew; but the passion had increased upon him with years, and the bait of the ten-pound note was not to be resisted. He took up the lantern, he got out of the grave, and looked carefully round. It was late at night—all was quiet—nothing seemed stirring; and approaching close to Moreton's side, he said in a whisper—

“No one knows that you were coming here, eh, Captain?”

“Nobody in the world,” replied the other. “I called at your house an hour ago, and the girl told me that you were down here, but I said I would call on you again to-morrow.”

“And you only want to look at the coffins and the book?” continued the sexton.

“Nothing else in the world,” said Moreton, in an easy tone; “perhaps I may take a memorandum in my pocket-book—that’s all.”

“ Well, then, give us the note, and come along,” replied the sexton; “ there can be no harm in that.”

Moreton slipped something into his hand, and they moved towards a little door in the side of the church, opposite to that on which stood the cottage of Stephen Gimlet. Here the sexton drew a large bunch of keys out of his pocket and opened the door, holding up the lantern to let his companion see the way in.

Moreton whistled a bit of an opera air, but the old man put his hand on his arm, saying, in a low tone, “ Hush ! hush ! what’s the use of such noise ? ” And leading the way to the opposite corner, he chose one of the smallest of the keys on his bunch, and stooped down, kneeling on one knee by the side of a large stone in the pavement, marked with a cross and a star, and having a keyhole in it, covered with a brass plate made to play in the stone. The old man put in the key and turned it, but when he attempted to lift the slab, it resisted. “ There, you must get it up for yourself,” he

* said, rising—"I can't. Take hold of the key, and with your young arm, you'll soon get it up, I dare say."

Moreton did as the other directed, and raised the slab without difficulty. When he had done, he quietly put the keys in his pocket, saying, "Give me the lantern!"

But Mr. Grindley did not like the keys being in Captain Moreton's pocket, and though he thought it was not worth while to make a piece of work about it, yet he kept the lantern, and went down first. A damp, close smell met them on the flight of narrow stone steps, which the old lords of the manor had built down into their place of long repose; and the air was so dark, that it seemed as if the blackness of all the many long nights which had passed since the vault was last opened had accumulated and thickened there.

For some moments, the faint light of the lantern had no effect upon the solid gloom; but as soon as it began to melt, the old man walked on, saying, "This way, Captain. I think it used to stand hereabouts, upon the

trestles to the right. That is your father's to the left, and then there's your mother's; and next, there's your little sister, who died when she was a baby—all lying snug together. The Moretons—that is, the old Moretons—are over here. Here's your grandfather—a jolly old dog, I recollect him well, with his large stomach and his purple face—and then his lady—I did not know her—and then two or three youngsters. You see, young and old, they all come here one time or another. This should be your great grandfather," and he held up the lantern to the top of one of the coffins. "No," he said, after a brief examination, "that is the colonel who was killed in '45. Why they put him here I don't know, for he died long before your great grandfather. But here the old gentleman is. He lived to a great age, I know."

"Let me see!" said Captain Moreton; and approaching the side of the coffin, he made the old man hold the lantern close to the plate upon the top. The greater part of the light was shed upon the coffin lid, though some rays

stole upwards, and cast a sickly glare upon the two faces that hung over the last resting-place of the old baronet. Captain Moreton put his hand in his pocket, at the same time pointing with the other to a brass plate, gilt, which bore a short inscription upon it, somewhat obscure, from dust and verdigris.

“There! it is quite plain,” he said; “1766!”

The old sexton had been fumbling for a pair of spectacles, and now he mounted them on his nose, and looked closer, saying, “No, Captain, 1760.”

“Nonsense!” said the other, sharply; “it is the dust covers the tail of the six. I’ll show you in a minute;” and as quick as light, he drew the other hand from his pocket, armed with a sharp steel instrument, of a very peculiar shape. It was like a stamp for cutting pastry, only much smaller, with the sharp edge formed like a broken sickle. Before the old man could see what he was about to do, he pressed his hand, and the instrument it contained, tight upon the plate, gave it a slight turn, and withdrew it.

"Lord 'a mercy! what have you done?" exclaimed the sexton.

"Nothing, but taken off the dust," answered Moreton, with a laugh; "look at it now! Is it not 66 plain enough?"

"Ay, that it is," said Grindley. "But this won't do, Captain—this won't do."

"By —— it shall do," replied the other, fiercely; "and if you say one word, you will not only lose the money, but get hanged into the bargain; for the moment I hear you've 'peached, I'll make a full confession, and say you put me up to the trick. So now, my old boy, you are in for it, and had better go through with it like a man. If we both hold our tongues, nothing can happen. We slip out together, and no one knows a syllable; but if we are fools, and chatter, and don't help each other, we shall both get into an infernal scrape. You will suffer most, however—I'll take care of that. Then, on the contrary, if I get back what they have cheated me and my father out of, you shall have 100*l.* for your pains."

At first, the sexton was inclined to exclaim

and protest; but Captain Moreton went on so long, that he had time to reflect, and—being a man of quick perceptions—to make up his mind. At first, too, he looked angrily in his companion's face through his spectacles, holding up the lantern to see him well; but gradually he dropped the light and his eyes together to the coffin-lid, examined it thoughtfully, and in the end, said, in a low, quiet, significant voice, "I think, Captain, the tail of that six looks somewhat bright and sharp, considering how old it is."

The compact was signed and sealed by those words; and Moreton replied, "I've thought of all that, old gentleman. It shall be as green as the rest by to-morrow morning."

Thus saying, he took out a small phial of a clear liquid, dropped a few drops on the plate, and rubbed them into the deep mark he had made. Then, turning gaily to his companion, he exclaimed, "Now for the register."

Grindley made no reply; and they walked up into the church again, put down the slab of stone, locked it, and advanced towards the

vestry. There, however, the old man paused at the door, saying, in a low, shaking voice, "I can't, Captain!—I can't! It is forgery—nothing else. I'll stay here; you go and do what you like—you've the keys."

"Where are the books kept?" asked the other, speaking low.

"In the great chest," said the sexton. "It must be the second book from the top."

"Can I find pen and ink?" inquired Moreton.

"On the table—on the table," answered Grindley. "Mathew Lomax had a child christened two days ago. But it wont never look like the old ink."

"Never you fear," said the other worthy; "I am provided;" and taking the lantern, he opened the vestry-door, and went in.

Captain Moreton set down the lantern on a little table, covered with green cloth, and proceeded about his work, quietly and deliberately. He was no new offender, though this was a new sort of offence; he had none of the young timidity of incipient crime about him: he had

done a great many unpleasant things on great inducements—pigeoned confiding friends, made friendships for the sake of pigeoning, robbed Begums, as was the custom in those days, shot two or three intimate acquaintances who did not like being wronged, and was, moreover, a man of a hardy constitution, so that his nerves were strong and unshaken. He tried two or three keys before he found the one which fitted the lock of the chest. He took out two volumes of registers, and examined the contents, soon found the passage he was looking for, and then searched for the pen and ink, which, after all, were not upon the table, but in the window. Then he tried the pen upon his thumb-nail, and took out his little bottle again, for it would seem that within that phial was some fluid which had a double operation—namely, that of corroding brass and rendering ink pallid. The register was laid open before him, a stool drawn to the table, his hand pressed tight upon the important page, and the pen between his fingers and thumb to keep all steady in the process of converting 1760 into 1766, when an unfortunate

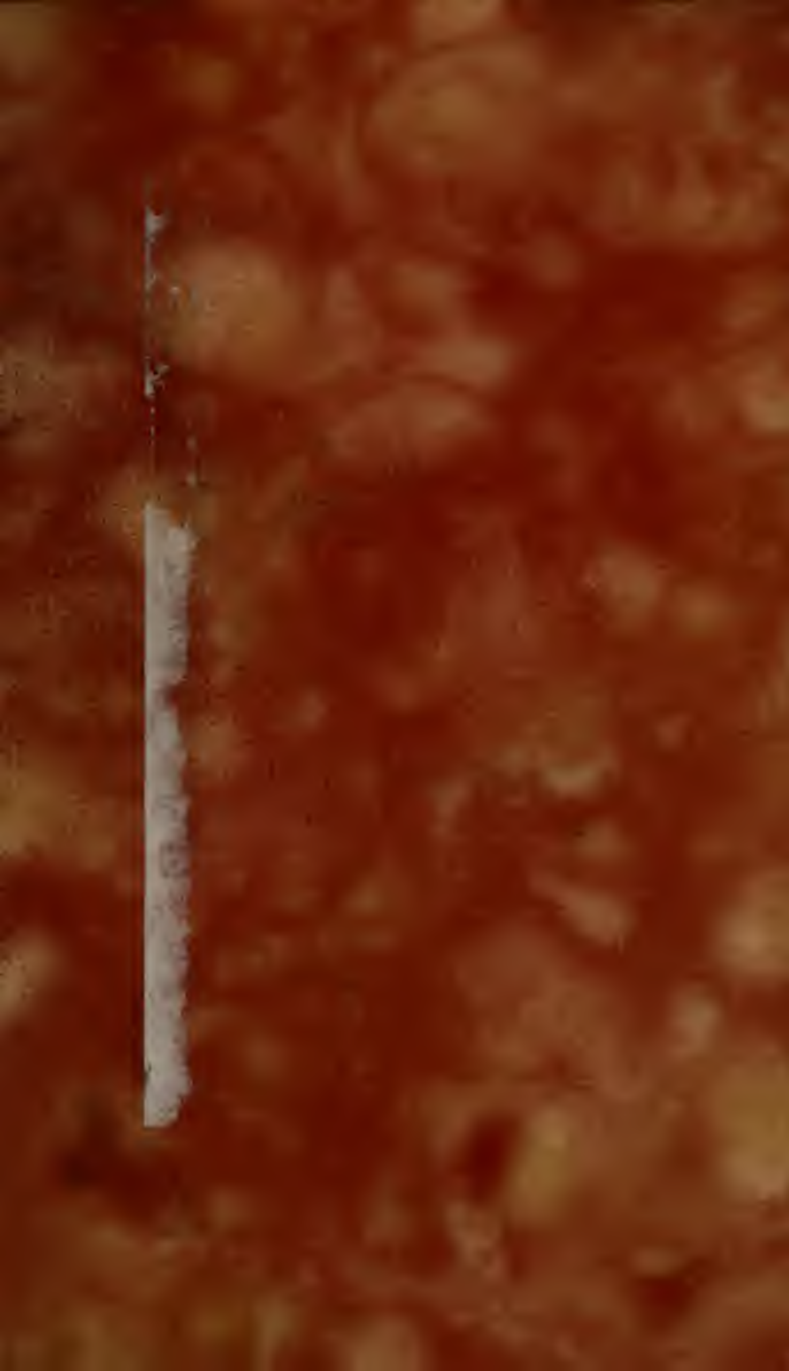
fact struck him—namely, that there were a great many insertions between the two periods. He paused to consider how this 'was to be overcome, when suddenly he heard an exclamation from without, and the sound of running steps in the church, as if some one was scampering away in great haste. He had forgotten—it was the only thing he had forgotten—to turn his face to the door, and he was in the act of attempting to remedy this piece of neglect, by twisting his head over his shoulder, when he received a blow upon the cheek which knocked him off his stool, and stretched him on the pavement of the vestry. He started up instantly, but before he could see anything or anybody, the lantern was thrown down, and the door of the vestry shut and bolted, leaving him a prisoner in the dark.

END OF VOL. II.

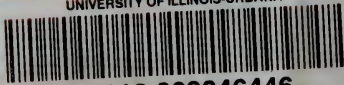








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